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Spiritual Islam in South Asia: Aspects of Inter- and Intra-Cultural (Gnostic-Sufi) Mingling in the Indian Sub-Continent

Mohd. Sanaullah*

1. Prologue

The deep religious philosophy of Islam is Sufism. It is the apprehension of divine realities and the Sufi saints better describe themselves as *followers of the "Real"* or *"Ahl al-Haqq"*. The human aspiration to a personal and direct approach to and a more intense experience of the Supreme Being and the religious truth embodied in a more interiorized worship and a deep and restless devotion to God are the very basis of the germination of mystic spirit in all religious denominations of the world, as mystical sense has never been the sole prerogative of any race, language or nation. It is to surpass the legal and canonical structure of a religion, often with an esoteric outlook, since the strong personal and psychological emotion of God-realization could hardly be satisfied by any orthodox or lifeless canonic of rituals and ceremonies or formal approach to the Ultimate Reality. The mystic thought often proved the protecting glacis of a society that has to have enormous vitality to stand as a solicitor between the static theology and the dynamics of life. Given the sociological dimensions of a more personal and psychological experience, this comes to smoothen the task of fostering the spiritual culture of humanity as a whole. The beyond-personal salvation mystical dimensions of Islam are to be posited in this perspective without meaning any deliberate or accidental metamorphosis of the Gnostic mysticism or the ontological and epistemological paraphrasing of the theosophy in the history of Islam.[1]

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1 For the Sufi dimension of Islam, we have hundreds of original Arabic and Persian sources, besides dozens of studies in different Oriental and European languages. Mention could be made of a few like: Ibn Arabi, *al-Footoohat al-Makkiyah*, Cairo 1329 AH; *Fosoos al-Hikam*, Cairo 1309-1321 AH; *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq* (tr. R. A. Nicholson), London 1911; al-Makki Abu Talib, *Qoot al-*Qoloob, Cairo 1310; Abu al-Qasim al-Qushairi, *al-Risalah al-Qushairiyah*, Cairo 1360 AH; Jami, *Lawaih* (text and tr. E. H. Whinfield and Mirza Muhammad Kazvini, London 1906, *Yusuf and Zulaikha*, (tr. R. T. H. Griffith), London 1882; Attar, *Mantiq al-Tair, Le Manticu 'ttair ou le Langage des* Oiseaux (tr. Garcin de Tassy), Paris 1864; Rumi, *Masnawi* (tr. by E.

Sufis trod difficult paths as well as pathless heights beyond as their ultimate journey helped them understand the deeper layers of personal as well as cosmic being and nothingness. Notwithstanding the variety of theories about the origin of mystic ideas in Islam (Hellenistic, Manichean, Buddhist, Vedantic, etc) that have been combated by the Muslim mystics who claimed that they were firmly based on the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet, the pantheistic views of the reality behind all creation and the hybrid ways of meditation and realization could hardly be reconciled with the course of the juristic theology and sociology of Islam. The deeper communion with God, who is the light of the heavens and the earth in the Holy Qur'an (XXIV:35), when defined in the mystical allegories of Gnostic temptations, the distinction needs to be categorized with some historical and sociological references which would never allow themselves to be used or misused for any exclusivist purposes.

Even if posited within the domain of universal wisdom, Islamic mysticism cannot be understood without reference to the outward and inward development of Islam as a religion. So even if a Muslim Sufi saint adopted the way of the ascetics who, in close resemblance to the Christian or Hindu hermits, clad themselves in coarse woolen garb as a sign of penitence and the renunciation of worldly vanities, his spiritual course and mystic initiation must be seen as part of the greater schema of the Islamic *Shariat* and *Tariqat*. Some epistemological differentiation is needed in analyzing the hierarchy or class of the Muslim mystics, since the earliest Sufis should be known as the Quietists who laid emphasis on *tauba* (repentance) rather than the mystical element of love and adoration and whose period extended from 661 AD to 850 AD. Hasan Basri (d. 728), Ibrahim Adham (d. 777), Abu Hashim (d. 777) and Rabi'a Basri (d. 776) were the foremost Quietists of early Islam. In the second half of the ninth century, Sufism approached the realm of spiritual metaphysics with an assimilation of the valuable mystic philosophical *rasail* or tracts written in Arabic. Maruf al-Karkhi introduced the doctrine of total forgetfulness while Sari Saqti (d. 870) brought the concept of *Tauheed* (Oneness). Dhu al-Noon al-Misri (d. 859) formulated the doctrine of *haal* (state) and *maqaam* (stage). Mansur al-Hallaj (d. 921) introduced the pantheistic elements in spiritual Islam.

H. Whinfield) London 1898; *Masnavi* I (tr. Sir James Redhouse), London 1881; *Masnawi* II (tr. C. E. Wilson) London 1910; Shams Tabriz, *Selected Odes from the Divan Shamsi Tabriz* (text and tr. by R. A. Nicholson), Cambridge 1898; Mahmud Shabistari, *Gulshan-e-Raz* (text and tr. by E. H. Whinfield), London, 1880; Abu Najib al-Suhrawardi, *Adaab al-Murideen*,Delhi 1319 AH; Shihabuddin Suhrawardi, *Awarif al-Maarif*, Cairo 1967; Tholuck, *Sufisme sive Theosophia Persarum Pantheistica*, Berlin, 1821; E. H. Palmer, *Oriental Mysticism*, Cambridge 1867; Brown, J. P., *The Dervishes or Oriental Spiritualism*, London 1868; Reynold A. Nicholson, *The Mystics in Islam*, Beirut, 1966.

He assimilated the doctrines of fusion (*hulul*), union (*ittehaad*), transmigration or reincarnation (*tanasukh*) and *rij'at* (return) within the ontological mould of Islam. These doctrines were discussed in a large number of Arabic manuals in the succeeding centuries and played a significant role in establishing a large number of Sufi paths. Shaikh Ali Hajweri (d. 1071) wrote that in his days there were twelve Islamic mystic ways, two of which were condemned (*mardood*) while ten were acceptable (*maqbool*).[2] The condemned ways were the ways of the *Hallajis* and the *Huloolis*. The *Taifooris, Qussaris, Kharrazis, Khufaifis, Sayyaris, Muhasibis, Tustaris, Hakimis, Nuris* and *Junaidis* were regarded as acceptable sects. But the most important point is that these sects paved the way for the emergence of mystic philosophers who worked towards the harmonization of the spiritual doctrines with the canonical outlook of their theology. Al-Qushairi (d. 1074) and al-Ghazzali (d. 1111) represented that powerful current in their systematic account of Islamic mysticism.[3] Al-Ghazzali believed that reason should be used to destroy trust in itself and that the only trustworthy knowledge was that gained through experience. The theological doctrines should not be proved by speculative methods but only by the direct knowledge with which God floods the heart of the believer.[4]

The thirteenth century produced three great mystic philosophers who reconstructed Islamic mysticism by their deep and comprehensive understanding and interpretation of the mystic science, mystic passion and mystic initiation. They were: the pantheist Shaikh Mohiuddin Ibn Arabi (d. 1248), the neo-Platonist Shaikh Shihabuddin Suhrawardi (d. 1234) and the Dervish Jalaluddin Rumi (d. 1273). The *Al-Futoohaat al-Makkiyah* and *Fusoos al-Hikam* of Ibn Arabi interpreted his pantheistic experiences of the unity of being in such a way as to be intelligible to others.[5] Not a single part of the Muslim world could be thought to have remained uninfluenced by the pantheistic teaching of Ibn Arabi. It was the mystic poet Iraqi (d. 1289) who took up Ibn Arabi's thoughts and made them available to the Indian masses. Rumi is a buzzword in all Indian paths of Sufism. Suhrawardi's *Awarif al-Ma'arif* and *Hikmat al-Ishraq* provided the Sufis with a gamut of mystic terms and principles. The first book is an excellent manual of Sufi-centered

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2 See Shaikh Ali Hajweri *Kashful Mahjoob* (tr. R. A. Nicholson), London 1911, p. 150 et seq.

3 Abdurrahman Chishti, *Mir'at al-Asrar*, Abdullah Kheshgi, *Ma'arij al-Wilayat*, Abdurrahman al-Sulami, *Tabaqat al-Sufiya*, Abul Fazl, *Ain-e-Akbari* (ed. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan), Delhi 1272; Abdul Haq Dehlawi, *Akhbar al-Akhyar*, Delhi, 1309 AH, etc.

4 In his *Ihya-i-Uloom al-Din, Kimya-i-s'adat* and *Ayyoha al-Walad*.

5 See Ibn Arabi, *al-Fotoohat al-Makkiyah*, vol. I, pp. 130-132

organization. The *Chishtiya* order of Islamic mysticism, which was founded in India by Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti, prized it greatly and a great Indian Sufi like Baba Farid Ganj-e-Shakar summarized the book and used to teach it to his elder disciples.

2. Sufism in South Asia: the Indian Sub-continent

Sufism arrived in India with the establishment of the Sultanate in Delhi (1206-1290). With the passage of time, India became home to all the Sufi orders, like the *Qadiriya* founded by Shaikh Abdul Qadir Jilani (1077-1166), the *Silsila-e-Khawjgan* or *Naqshbandia* founded by Shaikh Bahauddin Naqshband (d. 1388), the *Chishtiya* founded in India by Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti, and the *Suhrawardiya* founded in India by Shaikh Bahauddin Zakariya Muyltani. The *Firdausiya* order was founded in India by Shaikh Badruddin Samarqandi and the path was well received in Bihar. Shaikh Sharafuddin Yahya Maneri was a representative of that order. The *Shattariya* order was brought to India by Shah Abdullah Shattari (d. 1485) during the Lodhi period. This path attained an ephemeral and short-lived importance during the reign of the early Timurids.[6]

Sufism reached India after having developed a well-organized system of spiritual training and social service via Sufi centers and hospices. The system was based on the concept of spiritual territory (*wilaya*) with a hierarchy of saints who controlled a wide network of Sufi centers scattered over the country. The chief saint at the center was known as *Sultan al-Arifin, Sultan al-Mashaikh, Shah-e-Din, Sultan al-Hind* etc.[7]

During the lifetime of Abul Fazl, the well known chamberlain of the Emperor Akbar, India became home to fourteen orders: *Habibiya, Taifooriya, Karkhiya, Saqatiya, Junaidiya, Gazruniya, Tusiya, Firdausiya, Suhrawardiya, Zaidiya, Iyaziya, Adhamiya, Hubairiya* and *Chishtiya*,[8] but the *Chishtiya* and *Suhrawardia* orders soon gained popularity and within a short time the entire country from Multan to Lakhnauti and from Punjab to Deogir was studded with Sufi centers and hospices. A traveler from Syria, Shihabuddin al-Umari, informs us that early in the fourteenth century Delhi and its surroundings had two thousand hospices and Sufi centers.[9] The Suhrawardi Sufi saints flourished

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6 See Jami, *Nafhaat al-Uns*, Lucknow 1015, pp. 339-341; Amir Khurd, *Siyar al-Auliya*, Abdul Haq Dehlawi, *Akhbar al-Akhyar, Tazkira-e-Guzidah, Habib al-Siyar, Gulzar-e-Abrar, Mir'at al-Asrar, Ma'arij al-Wilayat*, etc.

7 Amir Hasan Sijzi, *Fawaid al-Fu'ad*, Lucknow, 1302), p. 2; *Siyar al-Auliya*, pp. 45, 48, 57.

8 *Ain-e-Akbari*, II, p. 203.

9 Ibn Fazlullah al-Umari, *Masalik al-Absar fi Mulook al-Amsar* (tr. by Otto Spies), Aligarh, p. 24.

mainly in Sind and Punjab. A few of them settled in and around Delhi but they were over-shadowed by the more popular Chishtis who established their centers at Ajmer, Narnaul, Suwal, Nagaur and Mandal in Rajasthan, Hansi and Ajodhan in the Punjab and some towns of Utter Paradesh. Later on, the order spread into other parts of India such as Bihar, Bengal, Assam and Deccan.

The popularity and success of the Chishti Sufis in India was due to their deep understanding of Indian conditions and the religious attitudes and aspirations of the Indian masses. The basic framework of their mystical philosophy assimilated a number of Indian customs and ceremonials, such as bowing before the Sufi master, presenting water to the visitor, circulating *zabil*, shaving the head of new entrants to the mystic brotherhood or circle, audition parties (*Sama*) and the inverted *chilla* (*chilla-e-makus*) a la *ardhamukhi* Sadhus, besides adopting some Indian forms of litany and techniques of purification similar to the *bhutshuddhi* practices of the Hindu yogis.[10] The anti-proselyte Chisthi saints were against religious persecution or execution. This background would rightly portray the true personae of the founder of Chishti order in India: Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti of Ajmer. This may easily be identified with major Sufi paths of South Asia.

3. Sufism in Bengal, Assam and Bangladesh

The Eastern part of the Indian sub-continent, later known as Bengal, Assam and Bangladesh, has been home to Sufism since the arrival of Islam in the region. Sufis of all mystic affiliations, antinomian and otherwise, have flocked to the region with their mystic zeal to spread the message of Islam. There have been the warrior saints of Islam, the Suhrawardis, the Sufis of antinomian inclinations and others. The chief sources of Sufism in the Indian sub-continent give us the names of a number of prominent Sufis who visited, migrated and settled in the region (in cities like Sylhet, Chittagong, Sunargaon, Pandua, Dhaka and Calcutta), besides the indigenous spiritual masters who were sons of the soil. We have a number of prominent Sufis. The legendary Shaikh Atauddin (1493-1519), whose ancestry is traced to Meerut and who was invited by Shaikh Sharafuddin Yahya Maneri of Bihar to move there, is known for his ascetic exercises that impressed the predominantly animistic Hindus and Buddhists of Chittagong, and Arakan. Aulia Shah (15th century) of Chittagong, one of the twelve aulia of Chittagong whose tombs are on the river Shromate at a distance

10 See *Fawaid al-Fu'ad*, p. 202, Hamid Qalander, *Khair al-Majalis*, p. 150; Amir Khurd, *Siyar al-Auliya*, p. 66, etc.

of a mile and a half from Patia Thana; Hazrat Shah Badar (d. 1346 AD), who came to Sylhet with Shah Jalal Mujarrad and who was accompanied by 360 of his Khalifas to Badarpur to preach Islam; Shah Badruddin Auliya or Badar Pir (d. 1440), who was venerated by the peoples of different faiths and whose tomb is situated in Bakhshi Bazar of Chittagong; Shah Sultan Balakhi (14th century) who came to Dhaka after renouncing the throne in Balakh; Sultan Bayazid Bistami, whose mausoleum is in Nasirabad, five miles away from Chittagong; Maulana Shah Muazzam Danishmand, popularly known as Shah Daulah, who came from Baghdad and settled at Bagha in the Rajshahi district of Bengal (he is said to have been a descendant of the Abbasid Caliph Harun al-Rasheed); Hazrat Safi, father of Ali Waisi (1825-86) of Chittagong, who died in Calcutta; Ghazi Shah Ismail (1474), who came from Mecca and preached Islam during the reign of Sultan Barbak Shah (1459-1474); Jalal Shaikh (d. 1357, a warrior saint of Turkish origin and a khalifa of Shaikh Ahmad Yassawi of the silsila-e-khajgan (who was driven by the Mongol invasion to Baghdad and thence to Uch and Multan and Delhi, finally making his way to Sylhet, (see *Gulzar-i-Abrar*) whose 42 prominent khalifas, including Shah Syed Omar Samarqandi, Zinda Peer, Shah Zat, Shah Makhdum, Daryaee Peer, Dada peer, Khidr Sufi and others, all buried in Sylhet, have been described in the historical accounts; Shah Jalal Mujarrd (d. 1189), a contemporary of Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya of Delhi, who had come to Sylhet with the army of Sikander Shah and who conquered Raja Gor Gobinda of Sylhet; Khan Jahan, the ascetic warrior saint of Bengal (d. 1459), who is buried at Bagerhat, some 53 miles to the east of Calcutta; Langar Shah (15th century) who is buried at Muazzmpur in Dhaka (according to a legend, he was descended from a royal line in Baghdad); the Sufi and Scholar Shah Mahmud (15th century), who is buried at Arwal; the Yemenite prince and dervish Makahdum Shah Daulah (d. 1293), who is highly venerated by the peoples of Bangladesh; Makhdum Shah Rajshahi (d. 1592), whose mausoleum was built by Quli Beg, a servant of Shah Abbas Safavi of Iran (1587-1692); Muhsin Auliya Shah (d. 1397), who came from Panipat along with Pir Badar and Qattal Pir; Shaikh Muzaffar (1400-01), the prominent disciple of Shaikh Sharafuddin Yahya Maneri and a state guest of the Ilyas Shahi rulers of Bengal; Shaikh Jalaluddin Mujarrd (13th century), a khalifa of Sultan Syed Ahmad Yassawi, who came to Bengal from Konya toward the close of the 13th century and established a khanqah in Sylhet; Syed Shah Musharraf Ali Qudumi (d. 1967); Naqshbandi Mujaddid Hazrat Amjad Ali (d. 1946-47), who had thousands of disciples in Sylhet and Assam; Shah Nasiruddin Nek Mardan Shah (14th century), who exerted immense influence on the peoples of Dinajpur; Shaikh Nor Qutub Alam (d. 1440), son and khalifa of Shaikh Ala

al-Haq Bengali and a staunch believer in the concept of wahdatul wojood (a pantheistic concept of existence) and guide of Shaikh Husamuddin Manikpuri; Niamatullah Shah, who made Dhaka the centre of his spiritual activities and who is buried in Purana Paltan; Shah Sultan Rami, who visited Bangladesh in 1053 AD/445 AH (the first saint to visit Bangladesh), 250 years before Shah Jalal Mijarrad arrived at Sylhet; Baba Adam Shaheed, the famous Bangladesh saint whose tomb is in Abdullahpur (Bikrampur, Dhaka); the Sufi-poet Shitalang Shah (15th century); Sikander Shah (1303), who defeated the army of Raja Gor Gobind (several legends are attached to him, like the one saying that, although he drowned while crossing the Surma river, he is still alive under the waters where he distributes fishes to the fishermen); Hazrat Shaikh Khaja Tameezuddin (d. 1899), whose ancestors hailed from Baghdad and Delhi; Shah Mohammed Yaqoob Badarpuri (d. 1958) and Maulana Ata wahiduddin (14th century). All of these saints and spiritual masters are venerated by the peoples of the region for their message of Sufi brotherhood and human values.[11]

4. Indian Thoughts in South Asian Sufism

Sufi meditations on the plethora of existential noetics of being, becoming, potentiality, probability and actuality, besides the monistic, pantheistic, anthropomorphist aspects, and the deliberations of *ijaad* (act of creation), *wojood* (existence), *shohood* (existential appearance), *tanazzulat* (descending-forms), *tajalliyat* (illuminations), *haqiqa* (reality), *ma'rifat* (Gnostic domain) and *ahdiyat* (oneness) etc, coupled with the paradigms of *anniyat* or I-ness, *huwiyat* or the thought of the divine mind and *Haqiqat-i-Muhammadia* (the Mohammedan reality) are different layers of Gnostic concepts with a good deal of affinity to other oriental and occidental systems of mysticism. Islam stood for the unity of God. The Sufis like Shaikh Abd al-Rahman Jami in his *Lawaih* identified the degrees and hierarchies of existence as the details of the Unity: Divinity (*lahut*), Power (*jabrut*), Spirit (*malakut*), Similitude (*amthal*) and Humanity (*nasut*). The Sufi cosmogony of macrocosm and microcosm in accordance with the spheres of command and creation (*alam al-Amr wa alam*

11 See: A. H. Dani, *Muslim Inscriptions of Bengal, JASB*, vol. II, 1957; Syed Murtaza Ali, *Tarikh-i-Chatgam*; E. A. Gait, *A History of Assam*, Calcutta 1933; *Imperial Gazetteer of India, Eastern Bengal and Assam*, Calcutta 1909; Hakim Habiburrahman, *Asudgan-i-Dacca* (1946); Ghulam Husain Salim, *Riyazus Salatin*, Calcutta 1890, J. N. Sarkar, *History of Bengal*; H. G. Kenne, *An Oriental Biographical Dictionary* (1894), Aulad Husain, *Notes on the Antiquities of Dacca* (1904); The Journal of Bihar and Orissa Research Society, Vol. III (1917); Enamul Haque, *History of Sufism in Bengal*; Khan Saheb, Memoires of Gaur and Pandua; Md. Abdur Rahim, *Life of Shah Jalal*; Blochmann, *Contribution to the History and Geography of Bengal*, in *JASB*, vol. III (1893); M. Sadiq Khan, *Badar Maqams*, in *JASP*, vol. VIII, No. 1.

al-Khalq) basically emanated from the Mohammedan reality which could be thought to be close to the Christian *Logos* and the Aristotelian Primal Reason. Man as microcosm (*alam-i- asghar*) possessed five elements each from *alam al-Amr* and *alam al-Khalq*. *Qalb* (Heart), *Ruh* (Spirit), *Sirr* (the Secret), *Khafi* (the Hidden) and *Akhfa* (the Most Hidden) belong to the former, while *Nafs* (Ego or Soul) and the four elements of Earth, Water, Fire and Air are assigned to the latter. The Sufis call them *Latifa*, or "subtle substance". The *Lataif* of *alam al-khalq* constitute the physical side of human life, and those of *alam al-Amr* are related to Gnostic psychological agents of communication. The Sufis have placed all the *Lataif* in appropriate corporeal and non-corporeal realms: *Qalb* resides on the throne of God, and above it in ascending order are *Ruh, Sirr, Khafi* and *Akhfa*. They have connections with the inner life of man, and are, therefore, located in the human body. *Nafs* is under the navel, *Qalb* is on the left side of the chest, *Ruh* is on the right side, *Sirr* is exactly between *Qalb* and *Ruh*, *Khafi* is in the forehead and *Akhfa* is in the brain. Some have placed *Akhfa* in the middle of the chest, *Sirr* between *Qalb* and *Akhfa*, and *Khafi* between *Ruh* and *Akhfa*. At the same time, each *Latifa* is related in a mysterious way to a certain prophet, and Sufis say that it lies under his foot. Qalb is under the foot of Adam, *Ruh, Sirr, Khafi* and *Akhfa* under the feet of Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad respectively.[12]

A Sufi aims at arousing these five *Lataif* into an active remembrance of God, or *Zikr*, *jali* or *khafi*, together with the attainment of *tajalli* or divine illumination. Heart is the subject of this illumination and is placed between *alam al-Khalq* and *alam al-Amr*, in *barzakh*, or the *intermedium*, a meeting place of physical and spiritual forces, and receives impressions from the external world through the five agents of thought, instinct, memory, reasoning and fancy. According to Ghazzali, wrath and desire are two servants of the heart who serve it perfectly in the journey to God. But sometimes they disobey the heart, becoming rebellious and enslaving the heart itself and joining hands with destructive forces.[13] The *tajalli* or divine illumination received by a Sufi may vary in degrees through the self-manifestation of the Deity: the mystic illumination of the divine acts is *tajalli-i-afa'al*, of the divine names *tajalli-i-shuhudi*, of the divine attributes *tajalli-i-sifati*, while that of the divine essence is *tajalli-i-zati*. The Sufi who receives illumination of the divine acts does not attribute any action to himself. Such a person may eat with you and then swear

12 See: Shah Muhammad Ghauth, *Asrar al-Tariqat*, Urdu translation, Manzil-i-Naqshbandiyya, Lahore nd., p. 16.

13 Ghazzali, *Ihya Uloom al-Din*, vol. III, p. 5.

that he has never eaten with you and then swear again that he has never sworn and in spite of this be honest in the sight of God.[14] When a mystic is illuminated by the divine names (there are one hundred and one in all) through which God manifests himself to the mystic, he is placed under the effulgence of these names, and when he invokes God by means of a particular name, God's servant answers him because the name is applicable to him. With the illumination of the divine name of *Qayyum* he reaches the highest stage of illumination. To invoke the divine names and consequently gain the respective powers has been much in vogue with the Sufis, especially the Sufis of the Shattari order, and Ghausi Shattari's *Aurad-i-Ghausiyah* well testifies to this.[15] By the effulgence of divine attributes, a mystic may be likened to one embarking on a boat and launching out on a sea which he explores to its utmost reaches.

His own existence is obliterated, his createdness is annihilated, and God sets up in the temple of the human body a subtle substance not detached from Himself nor joined to the creature as a substitute of that of which he was deprived or that which was lost in annihilation, or *fana*. But this is, nevertheless, an interpenetration or permeation, the *hulool*. With the illumination of the divine essence, a mystic gains the effulgence of the Absolute Being, or the Pure Essence, by dropping all modes and shades of adjuncts, relations and aspects. He becomes the Perfect Unit, *al-fard al-kamil*, the Universal Succour, *al-ghauth al-jami'*, the Seal of Sainthood and Vicar of God. The world of senses is subdued by his might and he does what he wills by his power. Nothing is veiled from him, and categories of existential potentiality and probability are not applicable to him.[16] That is the stage of *fana*, or annihilation of consciousness of manhood by becoming subsistent through holding the actions of God, or disappearance of I-ness of the mystic in the I-ness of Godhead, where the mystic is neither an agent nor an instrument, but one with the essence of God. He is, as seen by Jalaluddin Rumi (1207-1273) in his *Mathnawi*, neither a Christian, nor a Jew, nor a Muslim, nor a *Kafir*, nor of East or West, nor of the Elemental, nor of the Circling Spheres, nor of earth, fire, water or air, nor in any category of creation, nor from Adam, Heaven Hell. Rather, he is the Soul of the Souls. Again, he is a Christian, a Jew, a Muslim and a *Kafir*, all in one. He is the divine Throne, carpet, Footstool, Height and Depth. He is the Gospel, the Quran, the Talmud and the Vedas. For, he is the Soul of the Souls.

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14 Abd al-Karim al-Jili, *al-Insan al-Kamil*, vol. I, p. 34.

15 See: Ghausi Shattari, *Aurad-i-Ghausiyah*, ms in Maulana Azad Library, AMU, Aligarh.

16 Abd al-Karim al-Jili, *al-Insan al-Kamil*, vol. I, p. 15.

In that glory is no 'I' or 'We' or 'Thou'
'I', 'We', 'Thou' and 'He' are all one thing.[17]

The Sufis distinguish between *Nafs* and *Ruh*. The former is soul, while the latter is spirit. Soul is of seven different kinds: *Ammara* (depraved soul), *Lawwama* (accusatory soul), *Mulhama* (inspired soul), *Mutma'inna* (tranquil soul), *Radi'yah* (satisfied soul), *Mardi'yah* (satisfying soul) and *Safi'yah wa Kamilah* (clarified and perfect soul). A Sufi must endeavor to mortify the evil elements of the soul. This mortification of soul while related to abstinence of food or control of the feelings of hunger and appetitive cravings is called 'the white death' (*al-mawt al-abyadh*). The 'green death' (*al-mawt al-akhdar*) is to wear old coarse or loin clothes in a state of voluntary poverty, and the 'black death' (*al-mawt al-aswad*) is to voluntary taking of troubles and submitting to be evil spoken of for truth's sake.

5. The Mystic path of the Sufis

The mystic philosophy of the Sufis is characterized by a humanistic-pantheistic approach to God-realization. In a higher stage of God-realization where God is conceived as the totality cosmic existence and cosmic emotion become the *élan vital* of life, the mystic yearns to live for the Lord alone (chiefly by sublimating hunger and sex)[18] and a single moment's engagements with Non-Absoluteis is considered to be tantamount to spiritual death. The mystic literature is replete with stories of mystics who have appeared in sack-cloth and ashes on that account.[19] The mystic path of, say, Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti combines *marifat* (Gnosis) with Union or *wasl* in a mystical journey where the mystic passes through the ten stages of *Tauba* (Repentence), *Wara* (Abstinence), *Zuhd* (Piety), *Faqr* (Poverty), *Sabr* (Patience), *Shukr* (Gratitude), *Khauf* (Fear), *Raja'* (Hope), *Tawakkul* (Contentment) and *Riza* (Submission to the Divine Will).[20] During the spiritual journey, a mystic experiences different spiritual-psychological states like *Muhabbat* (love), *Shauq* (longing), *Ghairat* (jealousy), *Qurb* (proximity), *Haya* (Shame), *Uns-o-Haibat* (intimacy and awe), *Qabz-o-Bast* (contraction and expansion), *Fana-o-Baqa* (annihilation

17 Jalaluddin Rumi, *Diwan-i-Shams Tabrez*, p. 532. (tr. J. W. Sweetman. cf. Masood Ali Khan and S. Ram, eds., *An Introduction to Sufism: Origin, Philosophy and Development*, New Delhi, 2003, pp. 108-110.

18 see *Fawaid al-Fu'ad*, pp. 60-61, *Siyar al-Auliya*, pp. 454-455.

19 *Fawaid al-Fu'ad*, p. 224; *Khair al-Majalis*, pp. 224-245.

20 See *Awarif al-M'aarif*, pp. 588-620.

and subsistence) and *Ittisal* (Union). [21] This has very much in common with the mystic ways of India, especially Hinduism. [22]

Khwaja Moinuddin Chisthi represents the Universal Gnostic wisdom upheld in Islam by the *wahdatul wojoodi* (Pantheist) mystics like Hallaj, Ibn Arabi, Sadruddin Qawnavi, Rumi, Sarmad and others. This is the *Upnishadic* Pantheistic approach towards being: the supramental consciousness of being where the consciousness itself is existence and where there is no distinction between the knowledge, the knower and the object of the knowledge. The truth-consciousness as *saccidananda* is an ordering self-knowledge of the flux, diversity and unity of the infinite potentiality are allowed to proceed physically and metaphysically towards achieving the ontological goal in a complete homogeneous and harmonious way.

When the Khawaja said: *when we transcended the externals and looked around, we found the lover, the beloved and the love itself to be one, i. e. in the sphere of Oneness all is one*[23], he was talking in terms of that *Upnishadic* pantheistic way. The approach is altogether de-linked with any polemical determinism or dogmatic sectarianism. The anti-proselyte Chishti mystics have shown practically that their path believed in humanism with a total disregard for sectarian schemes in theology and culture.

6. The Sufis and Society: Service to Humanity, Pacificism and Non-violence

As enshrined in the message of Khwaja Moinuddin Chisthi's vision of society and the social role of mysticism in the lingual and religious pluralism in India portrays the great social visionary in the persona of a Sufi master. The Chishti saints believed that the inward march of the human soul from one spiritual station to another was futile unless married to one way or the other of social service. The social service was seen as the supreme object of all the spiritual exercises. When the Khwaja was asked about the highest forms of devotion, he replied that it was nothing but helping the poor, the distressed and the downtrodden.[24] The mystic always advised his disciple to live in society and

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21 See *Kashf al-Mahjoob*, pp. 307-308, *Fawaidal-Fu'ad*, p. 234, *Siyar al-Auliya*, pp. 548-550, Izzuddin Mahmud Ali Kashani, *Misbah al-Hidaya*, Lucknow 1322 AH, pp. 320 et seq, al-Suhrawardi, *Awarif al-M'aarif*, p. 636 et seq.

22 See my paper "The Mysticism in Islam: Path and Practices", Paper for the International Interfaith Seminar, K. J. Somaiya Bharatia Sanskriti Peetma, Mumbai, 4-7 Dec. 2006.

23 *Siyar al-Awlia*, p. 45.

24 *Ibid*, p. 185.

bear the blows and buffets of the people.[25] The Khwaja always made it a point for his disciples that the highest form of devotion to God is nothing but *to redress the misery of those in distress, to fulfill the needs of the helpless and to feed the hungry.*[26] Thus religion is raised above rituals and ecclesiastical formalities and service to humanity is made its very *raison d'etre.* For the Khwaja, river-like generosity, sun-like affection and earth-like hospitality are the qualities that endear a man to God.[27] He defines a dervish as a person who never disappoints the needy. The Khwaja believed that the best way of evading the fire of hell lies in feeding the hungry, providing water to the thirsty, meeting the wants of the needy and befriending the miserable. The mouth of a human being is sanctified irrespective of his faith: *Momin* or *Kafir* (believer or non-believer in Islam). For the follower of the path of truth it is worse than a sin to disdain or look down upon anyone. The stage of perfection in *irfaan* (the mystic path) is reached when a seer enlightens the hearts of other people with the Divine light. The mystic is one clothed in piety, respect to others and modesty.[28]

For Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya, devotion to God is of two kinds: *lazim* (intersitive) like ritual prayers, and *muta'addi* (transitive) which brings advantage and comfort to others. The second is performed by spending money on others and showing affection to people. With these social guidelines coupled with the organization of social services through *Khanqah*, the Chishti saints have recorded their laudable social imprints on Indian society. This mystic morality prevents human sympathy from running into narrow grooves and strikes at the very root of parochialism and exclusiveness of caste and creed.

A socialist dimension is clearly identified with the Sufi concept of *tark-i-dunya* (rejection of the world). This *tark-i-dunya* does not mean adoption of a hermit's approach to life and severing all earthly connections. A Chishti saint told his disciples that once Jesus Christ saw *dunya* in the form of an ugly woman and asked: "How many husbands hath thee?" "Innumerable", replied the hag. "Hath any of these husbands divorced thee?" asked Christ. "No", replied the old woman, 'I have myself finished them."[29] The Sufis have considered *sughl* and *shahwat* (worldly engagements and desires) to be real barricades (*hijabaat*) between man and God and rejection of the world means rejection of all worldly allurements. Here the Chishtis give us the real concept

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25 *Ibid,* p. 237.

26 *Ibid.,* p. 46.

27 *Ibid.,* p. 46.

28 See Masud Ali Khan and S. Ram, *Chishti Order of Sufism and Miscellaneous Literature,* pp. 171-180.

29 *Fawaid al-Fu'ad,* p. 21.

of renunciation. Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya said that the rejection of the world does not mean that one should strip oneself of one`s clothes or put a loin cloth and sit idle. Instead, rejection of the world means that one may put on clothes and take food. What comes to him (unasked) he should accept but not hoard it. He should not place his heart on anything. Only this is the rejection of the world.[30] It is, as Rumi says:

Cheest dunya az khuda ghafil shudan
Nai qumash o nuqra o farzand o zan

This basic principle of the Chishtis advised them against possession of private property. Keep only what is absolutely necessary and distribute the rest, as real happiness was not in accumulating money but in spending it.[31]

The Muslim Sufi saints of India, irrespective of the order to which they were affiliated, believed in a pacific and non-violent approach to all problems of human society. Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya says that if a man places thorns in your way and you do the same, there will be thorns everywhere.[32] Emphasis is laid firmly on developing the faculties of patience and endurance. If a man gets excited at the slightest provocation it debases his spiritual powers. So anger should be suppressed and forgiveness should be cultivated since it combats the wrong in a better way.

Chishtis believed that self-criticism was the best way to minimize friction in society. If a person begins to scrutinize his behavior in the face of some conflict, it leads to the disappearance of bitterness and enmity. Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya said that if there is strife between two persons, say, between me and some other person, the best solution is: I should on my part cleanse my heart of all ideas of revenge. If I succeed in doing that, the enemy's desire to do me harm will also be lessened.[33] A man has good and bad tendencies. In mystic terms, it is the story of *nafs* and *qalb* (animal soul and human soul). The *nafs* is the abode of mischief, strife and animosity, while *qalb* is the centre of peace, goodwill and resignation. If a man opposes you under the influence of his *nafs*, meet him with the power of *qalb*. It will over-power his *nafs* and strife would end. But if a man opposes *nafs* with *nafs*, there can be no end to conflict and strife.[34]

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30 *Ibid*, p. 9.

31 *Ibid*, pp. 130, 190, *Siyar al-Auliya*, p. 204.

32 *Fawaid al-Fu'ad*, p. 190.

33 *Siyar al-Auliya*, p. 555.

34 *Fawaid al-Fu'ad*, p. 124.

Sufi saints of India have demonstrated the implementation of these principles of non-violence in their own lives. Baba Farid Ganj-e-Shakar said to his disciples: placate your enemies. Do not give me a knife. Give me a needle. The knife cuts and the needle sews. Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya used to recite these lines in Persian:

Har key mara yaar nabud iizd oora yaar bud
Aanky ma ra ranj dadah rahatash bisyar bad
Har key oo dar rahey ma kharyey nehad az dushmani
Har kali kaz baghey umrash bashghuft bekhar bad

(He who is not my friend, may God be his friend! And he who bears ill-will against me, may his joys increase. He who puts thorns in my way on account of enmity, may every flower that blossoms in the garden of his life be without thorns!)

This is the principle of *Ahimsa* which was extended even to animals by some Sufis of India. Shaikh Hamiduddin Nagauri was a strict vegetarian and disapproved of the slaughter of animals. According to *Suroor al-Sudor*:

Naksatand key az barai ishanwaba sabab e ishan janey bejan shawad

(He did not like any living being to be deprived of its life for him or on account of him).[35]

He exhorted his disciples again and again to develop vegetarian tastes.[36] Chishtis disassociated themselves from the centers of political power and rejected offers and all endowments. They used to say:

Shah ma ra deh dehad minnat dehad
Raziq ma rizq bey minnat dehad

(The King gives a village and holds us under obligation; our Providence gives us daily bread without placing us under any such obligations.)

Iltutmish offered *jagir* to Shaikh Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki but it was not accepted by the Shaikh. Shaikh Hamiduddin Nagauri preferred to live in abject poverty rather than accept anything from the Sultan. Baba Farid Ganj-i-Shakar's curt reply to Ulugh Khan's offer of village was:

Talib een bisyar und, bedishan bedihi

(There are many who desire it, give it to them).[37]

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35 *Suroor al-Sudoor*, p. 10.

36 *Ibid*, p. 43.

37 *Rahat al-Qoloob* (MS), f. 35 (b), *Fawaid al-Fu'ad*, p. 99.

Shaikh Auliya strictly warned his disciples against accepting any village or stipend or favor from kings and officials or any government service, as it was not permissible for a dervish.[38] It was the practice in the *jamatkhana* (community kitchen) of Shaikh Auliya to give away everything in the store on Friday to the poor and the house was cleared and swept.[39] This attitude of the Chishti saints in India (in contrast to that of the Suhrawardi's) provided them with ample opportunities to serve the society without coming under any pressure from the ruling class. They had a world of their own where even the mighty Balban (who would refuse to talk to low born persons in his court) must have realized that there were places in his empire where his own position was no more exalted than that of any ordinary man. The contamination of court life could not touch the spiritual serenity and classless atmosphere of the Sufi saints.

The Chishti *khanqah* or Sufi center stands as a powerful symbol of educational and social service. The *khanqah,* which usually consisted of a *jamatkhana* (community hall), was used by all the inmates, who lived a communal life. The inmates slept, prayed and studied under the pillars of the *khanqah*. If food was available, all would partake of it; if not, all would suffer jointly the pangs of hunger. Other *khanqahs* which accepted unsought amounts of charity would provide better meals to the inmates as well as the visitors.[40] Apart from the personal service to the Shaikh or the chief of the *khanqah*, the *jamatkhana,* carried out cooperative management of various things. The *khanqah,* which remained open till mid-night, was visited by people from different sections of society: scholars, politicians, soldiers, Hindu Jogis, Qalanders and ordinary folk with different material and spiritual aims. Every visitor was attended to and Sufi masters like Shaikh Nasiruddin Chiragh-i-Dehli instructed his disciples to be extremely polite in dealing with them. "Every visitor who comes", the Shaikh once told his audience, "belongs to a group of worldly men or mystics. If he is a worldly man, his heart is involved in worldly affairs. The moment he enters and my eyes fall on him, I ask him about his condition. Even if he does not say so, all that he has is revealed to me and I feel depressed and gloomy. Some people lose all control and shout: "Be quick and do this," If I don't, they abuse me and behave insolently. A dervish should be patient with all.[41]

With the exception of Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya, all the early Chishti Sufi saints of India led a married life. Great masters like Khwaja Moinuddin

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38 *Siyar al-Auliya*, p. 295.

39 *Ibid*, p. 131.

40 *Fawaid al-Fu'ad*, p. 36, *Khair al-Majalis*, p. 136.

41 *Khair al-Majalis*, pp. 105-106.

Chishti, Shaikh Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki and Baba Farid had a positive view on married life, though some of them were so engrossed in their mystic contemplations that they were sometimes unaware of the actual state of their household.

7. Sufi Contribution to South Asian Society and Culture

From the 13th century onwards Sufism in South Asia increasingly attracted the creative social and intellectual energies within the community to become the bearer or instrument of a social and cultural revolution. The advent of Sufism in India took place long before the Ghurid or the Turkish armada overran the country. The preaching of the Sufi saints, together with their broad human sympathies and social services, constituted a social order that attracted the various cross-sections of Indian society. The medieval Sufi centers were the spear-heads of Muslim mystic culture, doing away with distinctions of noble and low-born, rich and poor, men or women. The Turkish Sultans, nurtured on the Sassanid ideas of kingship, refused even to talk to low-born persons, but the Muslim Sufi masters opened the gates of their Sufi centers to all irrespective of caste, creed or religion. Education was the exclusive privilege of the upper strata of society. In contrast to that, Sufi masters stood up against illiteracy and worked for education for all. The conquerors who established their political supremacy by virtue of certain moral and dogmatic prerogatives were less acceptable to the people of a country with a complexity of races, languages, cultures and religions. The conservative and reactionary theologians or the Ulema of Islam in India rarely accepted any change in the situation and seldom tried to modify their religious and social thought in accordance with the need of the hour. It was the Muslim mystic of India who rose to the occasion and released syncretic forces, eliminating social and linguistic barriers between various culture-groups. This is to be taken as the fundamental contribution of the Muslim mystics towards fostering a common cultural outlook.

Khawaja Moinuddin Chishti came to Ajmer in 1190 and breathed his last in 1237. The teacher, the seeker of truth and the social philosopher in him played a pioneer role in the construction of a syncretic understanding between two hard-to-compromise communities.

The mystic mission of the Khawaja was carried out by a number of eminent disciples who consolidated their mystical position and popularity in both urban and rural North India. The King of the Recluses (*Sultan al-Tarikeen*) Shaikh Hamiduddin al-Sufi (d. 1274), a posthumous child of Shaikh Muhammad al-Sufi, popularized the order in Rajputana. A strict vegetarian who could

talk in the popular *Hindvi* (Hindi) language, he was able to discern and appreciate the spiritual virtues of the non-Muslims. The Pantheistic ecstatic Shaikh Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki (1154-1235), who turned down the post of *Shaikh al*-Islam (Spiritual Head of the State) which was offered to him by Sultan Iltutmish of Delhi, stood as an icon of mystic austerity and renunciation in Delhi. He had prominent disciples like Shaikh Badruddin Ghaznavi (who settled in Delhi) and Shaikh Fariduddin Ganjshakar (1175-1265) who lived and worked in Hansi and Ajodhan. It was Baba Farid whose endeavors allowed the Chishti order to attain an all-Indian status.

The Shaikh is known for his practice of *chilla-e-makus* on the pattern of yogic *sirasan* and *savasan*. Shakh Jamaluddin Hansvi, Shaikh Najibuddin Mutawakkil, Shaikh Badruddin Ishaque, Shaikh Ali Sabir Kalyari, Shaikh Arif, Shaikh Fakhruddin Safahani (1213-1257) and Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya of Delhi (1247-1324) were the seven disciples of Baba Farid who spread the order and met with a good deal of wrath from some yogis, while Shaikh Nizamuddin Aulia's disciples, like Amir Khusrau (1253-1324) and Nasiruddin Chiragh-e-Delhi (1276-1357), were known for their cross-blending of culture.

Right from the first days of Muslim rule up to modern times no mystic affiliation and ambience, apart from the Chishti order of Sufism founded by Khawaja Moinuddin Chishti, can be discerned in the Indian subcontinent. The Khawaja who called for a Gnostic mystical system of the purification of the soul and who encountered and interacted with a number of Hindi yogis equated true religiosity with selfless service to the humanity. The spiritual powers and miracles associated with Khawaja are a good hagiographic account which is rarely missed in any significant source on Islamic mysticism in India. His utterances have been preserved for posterity in India's Persian compilations like *Ganj al-Asrar, Anis al-Arwah, Dalail al-Arifin* and *Diwan-e-Moin*. The mausoleum of Khawaja Moinuddin Chishti in Ajmer, India, is visited every year by hundreds of thousands of devotees across religious and ethnic lines. That too stands as a powerful icon of the socio-religious and cultural syncretism of South Asia.