Sufism: Religious Change in the Medieval Deccan (India)

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Introduction

The Medieval Deccan was ruled by the Bahmani Dynasty and their clans of Shahi Sultans. At the same time, the south was ruled by the Vijayanagara Dynasties. These two followed different religions and cultures. But the Deccan was naturally in the influence of the Islamic culture. The Haridas movement in the Vijayanagara and the Sufi movement in the Bahmani-Shahi Kingdoms occurred at a common point of time in the history, had a common content and served a common purpose. Their forms however were different though Hinduism and Islam were contributing a lot to the mystical aspects of Sufism. The Bhakti movement also gained respect due to the popularity of mysticism spreading through India. The Bhakti movement was a regional revival of Hinduism linking language, geography, and cultural identities through devotional deity worship. This concept of Bhakti appeared in the Bhagavad-Gita and the first sects emerged from south India from the seventh century A.D. Its practices and theological concepts were very similar to Sufism. Bhakti devotees linked Pooja with songs on gods, saints and theories of life; they would meet often to sing and worship. The Bhaktis developed mystical philosophies similar to those advocated by Sufi saints. For example, the Bhaktis believed that there is a special reality beneath the illusion of life; this reality needs to be recognized to escape the cycle of reincarnation. Moreover, liberation from earth (moksha) is the ultimate goal in Hinduism. These teachings run nearly parallel to Sufi concepts. Their aim was to purify the society by eradicating the religious and social prejudices and wrong practices.

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Sufism- Religious Change

All mysticism is born in religion. Sufism was born in the bosom of Islamabad and the Bhakti in the Gita. Among the Sahabah (the companions of the Prophet), there were, at the very beginning, people who despised the world and led an austere life. This tendency, common to all religions, affirmed itself among the Muslims when Islam was rapidly expanding in the first century of the Hizari assured to its adherents political supremacy from Spain to the Indus. The Muslim mystics or the Sufis of the first two centuries of the Hizari were ascetics, men of deep religious feeling, who laid great stress on the principles of Tauba (repentance) and Tawakkal (trust in God). These early mystics of Islam were fundamentally inspired by the Quranic conception of a transcendent God. Their contemplation remained confined within the limits of the Quran and the practice of the Prophet. Then Sufism had become a monotheistic theosophy, of which the fear of god and the Day of Judgement were the dominant features, but the element of loving adoration was not altogether absent. Rabia, the woman mystic of the second century Hizari, says ‘Love of God hath so absorbed me that neither love nor hate of any other thing remains in my heart.’ In her verses also she uses the symbolical language of human love to describe the relations between the mystic and his Divine Beloved, a practice, which become popular in the later centuries, both in the Arabic and Persian languages.¹

The erotic imagery used by Dhul Nun Misri in his verses is full of passionate devotion to the Divine Being. In fact, the nature of love is such that it tends to resolve all differences between the lover and the beloved in to one simple unity. In later centuries the allegory of love became a prominent characteristic of Sufi literature.

The asceticism of the early Sufis gave birth to the regular movement of Tasawwuf in the third century of the Hizari, aiming at the loving devotion to God and a discipline of the individual soul. At Baghdad, under the Abbasids, the Sufi theosophy attained its perfection. The influence of Greek thought had shaken the very foundations of Islamic faith, and scepticism had become the order of the day. To meet this situation, the Muslim theologicians had to justify their faith and dogma by logical disputation. This was a very favourable moment for the incubation of mystical doctrines, likely to give a spiritual satisfaction to troubled souls who cared more for the inner light than external rituals, however ingeniously sought to be justified by argumentation.²

The man who played an important and decisive role in the history of Sufism was a Persian, the celebrated Bayazid Bustami, a contemporary of Dhul Nun Misri, who gave a definite turn to Tasawwuf by introducing in to it the element of ecstasy and the mystic doctrine of the immanence of God, which is Islamic mysticism has invariably implied that “all is in God” and “not that all is God”, as is sometimes erroneously believed. He was banished from his native town for having made heterodox declarations which shocked the orthodox Ulema. He said, “Beneath the cloak of mine there is nothing but God. Glory to me! How great is my Majesty” (Tazkiratul Auliya).

Bayazid died on 875 A.D. His school took the name of “Taifurian”. He was the Islamic mystic to employ the word “Fana”, the annihilation of self, which later became the base of Sufi theology. It implies that human attributes are annihilated through union with God, a state in which the mystic finds eternal life (Baqa).

After the Muslim conquest in India, various Sufi orders were established. In particular, the Chisti and the Suhrawardy orders took root in different parts of the country including the Deccan. The other Sufi orders like Qudri, Naqshbandi, Shuttari and Madari, etc., were also represented and functioned on more or less the same lines.³ Sayyid Mohammed Hussain Bandanawaz Gisudaraz, the best known Sufi in the court of the Bahmanis. He belonged to the Chisti tradition of Sufism. The doctrine opposed the Ulema or Islamic orthodoxy, which said that nothing existed but God, with the argument that all reality was a borrowed fragment from the being of God, quite similar to the Vaishnavism that Ramanuja put forward or the Dvaita of Madhva.
However, Bandanawaz’s compromise with the court made his positions highly orthodox. The Qadri and Suttari Sufi orders taking on from their origins in Ajmer and Arab countries failed to sustain their independence from the court and by the fifteenth century reverted to positions put forward by orthodox Islam, thus paling out.

Ibrahim Adil Shah II (1580-1627 A.D.) was honoured with the title Jagadguru and the period was mixer of the both Hindu and Muslim cultures. He revived the various Sufi sects. The Qadri and Suttari sects moved to Bijapur and tried to bring reform in the royal court of its so called un-Islamic practices. The Chisti Sufis, however, like the Dasakuta, moved out of the financial patronage of the court and took the movement among the urban and rural masses, Muslim, as well as non-Muslim. It must be remembered that the Chistis were composed basically of Deccani Muslims, while the Suttari and Qadri sects retained the Ajmeri and Arab lineages.

“The essence of the doctrine taught by the Adil Shahi’s Chisti Sufis; Eaton writes “was that there exists between man and God a hidden spiritual path (rah) along which the seeker (talib) or traveller (salik) journey’s on his life’s quest to reach the divine. Two conditions were required of the prospective traveller: one was that he be a Muslim or become a Muslim and the other that he entrusts himself to the guidance of a learned Pir (guru) who would lead him from one stage to the next…….”

The relationship achieved in the final stage, God as lover or friend, finds a parallel in the Bhakti ideal of a personal deity actively concerned with his devotees, characteristic of both the Lingayat and Vithoba traditions of the Deccan. On occasion, Bijapuri Chistis drew directly from the Bhakti tradition to illustrate their doctrines. While Burhan al-Din went far in incorporating aspects of Hindu cosmology and nomenclature in to his theosophy, and while many parallels can be found between Sufi devotionalism and Bhakti thought, it would be dangerous from this to generalise about the relations between Sufis and Hindus as a whole. For one thing, the central ideas expressed by these Sufis remained thoroughly within the framework of the Islamic tradition…….

In Indian religions, music is common and has always been present as a rich tradition. As an influential medium to disperse ideas, music has appealed to people for generations. The audience in India was already familiar with hymns in local languages. Thus Sufi devotional singing was instantly successful among the populations. Music transmitted Sufi ideals seamlessly. In Sufism, the term music is called Sama or literary audition. This is where poetry would be sung to instrumental music; this ritual would often put Sufis into spiritual ecstasy. The common depictions of whirling dervishes dressed in white cloaks come to picture when paired with Sama. Many Sufi traditions encouraged poetry and music as part of education. Sufism spread widely with their teachings packaged in popular songs accessing mass demographics. Women were especially affected; often used to sing Sufi songs during the day and in female gatherings. Sufi gatherings called as Qawwalis. One of the biggest contributors to the musical Sufi tradition was Amir Khusru (1325 A.D.) known as a disciple of Nizamuddin Chishti, he was a most talented musical poet in the early Muslim period of India. He is considered the founder of Indo-Muslim devotional music traditions. Nicknamed “Parrot of India,” Amir Khusru furthered the Chishti affiliation through this rising Sufi pop culture within India. (Abidi, S.A.H. (1992). Sufism in India. New Delhi: Wishwa Prakashan).

The Sufi philosophy ‘devotion to God and respect for one’s Pir’ are the common themes. Just as the Kirtanas of the Haridasas and the Vachanas of Saranas, the Sufis adopted forms common among the peasantry in which they composed their songs. The Chakki-nama (sung while turning the grindstone), Charaka-nama (sung while spinning thread) Lori-nama (lullaby) and Suhagan-nama (wedding song) were forms in which they made their compositions and which were carried to and repeated by the masses, generally these compositions made for the Deccani women.

In almost all parts of the country, the Sufis had established their hospices (Khanqahs) where spiritual congregations were held under the presidency of the mystic preceptor (pir), who prescribed the mystic
discipline for his followers. Music was generally patronised in the hospices of the Chisti and Suhrawardy orders and Qawwals (singers) sang Persian songs. Some times, the above said songs were also sung in Hindi. References to such congregations of Qawwals found in the Akbar Akhyar, Badauni, Amali Saleh, Haft Aqlin and other works in the medieval Indian history.

The mystic discipline through the hospices continued to progress till the end of the seventeenth century, after which deterioration set in. But even in the eighteenth century. Some of these hospices were centres of spiritual culture. For instance the Khangah of Khwaja Mir Dard was one such center.

The Sufis in India, as elsewhere, attached an esoteric significance to the teachings of the Quran. To them it had deeper and more inward sense, but they did not claim any exclusive knowledge of mysteries of existence. They, however, propounded a scheme of life within the limits set by the law of Islam (Shariat) which they considered formed the true path (Tariqat) to the ultimate goal of attaining nearness to God. They preached inward light as against the dogmatic formalism of the ecclesiastics and the legists, and their exalted idealism brought spiritual solace and comfort to many a heart tossed on the sea of uncertainty and doubt. 9

Prominent Sufi Saints in the Deccan

Sufism is nothing other than Islamic mysticism. The saints who preached the principles of Sufism are called Sufi saints. Deccan in general and Karnataka in particular there are four hundred and twenty five references to Sufi saints’ darghas are found.10 The advent of Sufi saints would have been from the very inception of Islam in the beginning of the 7th century A.D. in South India. Trade and commerce carried out by the Arabs paved a way for Islam and later for Sufism entered in to Karnataka.

Sufism first entered the Western Coast along with the Arab merchants who have been mentioned in inscriptions as Tajjikas.11 The earliest reference to a Sufi saint in Karnataka can be traced back to 1301 A.D. Hazrat Sayyid Shah Hisamud-din-Teighbarana was the first saint to come to Gulbarga. At present his tomb is located in the fort near Jagath Talab in Gulbarga.12 Another reference is of Nurulla Qadiri lived during the Vijayanagara period (1336 A.D. to 1565 A.D.). The tomb at Kadirampura at Hampi was erected in honour of him.13 It shows that the Sufis also influenced the Vijayanagara. Karnataka was ruled by many Muslim dynasties. In the Deccan, The Bahamanis, the first Muslim dynasty was ruled in the northern parts of Karnataka (1347 A.D. to 1538 A.D.), and later the Adil Shahis (1489-1686 A.D.) After them, North Karnataka was under the rule of the Nawabs of Savanur, the Moghals, the Barid Shahis of Bidar and the Nizams of Hyderabad. The southern part of Karnataka was under the reign of Haider Ali and his son Tipu Sultan (1761 A.D. to 1799 A.D.). During the Muslim reign, the Sufis had found an amicable geographical and cultural abode in Karnataka for Sufi flourishment and popularity. The kings and queens of Karnataka like the common people promoted Sufism. The Sufi saints who came from North India as well as from Persia, Arabia and Baghdad settled here because of its amicability and great concern of the people. There were different types of Sufis living in Karnataka, like the landed elites, warriors, reformists, literates and dervishes. Sufism has been variedly ordered and institutionalised. It has the practice of taking the pupil into the order (Silsilah) and the concept of pir (Guru) and perzad (pupil). In India, there prevailed six orders and four orders in Karnataka, namely Chisti, Qadiri, Sattariya and Suhrawardia.14

The Bahmanis ruled Gulbarga from 1347 to 1424 A.D. and Bidar from 1424 to 1538 A.D. During their period many Sufi saints lived. The most important among them are Shiaq Sirajud –din-Junaidi, Gesu Daraz (Bande Nawaz) in Gulbarga and Syed Tajuddinin in Bidar was the most important Sufi saints. The Bahmani rulers from the very beginning of their rule in Karnataka gained the goodwill and co-operation of the Sufi saints. Hazrat Shaikh Saad Zanjani Rahimatullah Aulia came to
Gulbarga in 1351 A.D. Then Hazrat Shaikh Minajuddin Tamim-ul-Ansari came to Gulbarga from Daulatabad in 1352 A.D. At present his dargah is located in Kirana Bazaar near fort road at Gulbarga. Hazrat Shah Ruknud-din Tola of Qadiri order is said to have come to Gulbarga before Gesu Daraz during the period of King Firuz Shah Bahman. His dargah at present is located near Chor Gumbaz in Gulbarga.\(^{15}\)

One of the most prominent figures in the early history of Islamic mysticism in Gulbarga was Syed Muhammad Gesu Daraz (1321-1422 AD). He was of the Chishti order that had created a centre of Sufi culture at Gulbarga. He was the disciple of Chishti saint Shaikh Nasirud-din Chirag.\(^{16}\) A profound scholar, with a keen and penetrating insight into the religious sciences, Gesu Daraz gave a new fillip to religious studies in Karnataka. He has written a commentary on the Qur'an and another on the Mashariq-al-Anwar (a famous collection of the Traditions of the Prophet). He had studied Hindu mythology and was conversant with the Sanskrit language also. Other than these famous Sufi saints, there are some more references for Sufi saints who lived in Gulbarga during the 15th century A.D. They are., Hazrat Shah Bahaud-din Langot Band Rehamathullah Aulia , Hazrat Moulana Hafeez , Moula Qadar, Moulan Aftiquuddin, Moulan Kamal Girayan, Hazrat Pir Bangdhi , and Bahaman Shah Sahib.\(^{17}\) Syed Tajuddin is said to have played a vital role in bringing the social and cultural synthesis in Bidar. He was popularly called “Raja Bagh Sawar” of Kalyana (Bidar) and was also one of the prominent followers of Gesu Daraz of Gulbarga.\(^{18}\) He was also respected by the Bahamani King Alaud-din Ahamad, Humayun and Nizam Shah Bahamani. These kings had great respect for him. The study of the Sufis saints of the Bahamani period shows that they were popular among the kings and the masses alike in bringing welfare and social harmony.

During the Adil Shahi period, Sufi saints migrated to Bijapur from various places like Baghdad, Arabia, Persia, Sindh, and from other places in North and South India like Daulatabad, Ahmadabad, Gujarat, Broach, Bidar and Gulbarga. About twenty-seven Sufi saints were living during the period of King Ibrahim II, about eleven of them were in the period of King Muhammad and four were in the period of King Ali II. Single references to the Sufi saints are recorded in the period of Kings Yusuf, Ibrahim I and Ali I. Bijapur remained relatively barren as a centre for Sufism prior to the reign of Ibrahim II but the post 1583 period saw Sufism flourish in Bijapur to a significant degree.\(^{21}\) Sayyid Chanda Husaini joined the cavalry of King Yusuf Adil Khan. Shaikh Shamsal-Din Zinda Dil was the only Sufi saint of the Shattari order, who came from Shiraz (Persia) to Ahmedabad and then to Bijapur during the period of King Ali Adil Shah I. Shah Miranji Shamsal-Ushashaq of the Chisti order came from Mecca. Shah Nur al-Din Safawi, Shah Abdul-Hasan Qadiri lived during the period of Ibrahim II and Muhammad, Shah Sibghat Allah, Shah Hashim Alawi, popularly remembered as Hashim Gujarati, or Hashim Pir, Abul Hasan, Shah Mustafa Qadiri, Shah Qasim Qadiri, Shaikh Abd Allah Aidarus (1631-32 A.D.) were most prominent saints.\(^{22}\)
In the reign of Sultan Muhammad, majority of Sufis came directly from Arabia, Egypt, Baghdad, and other parts of India like Bidar, Gulbarga, Burhanpur, and Gujarat to Bijapur. Abd al-Samad Kanani (from Egypt), Ismail Qadiri bin Hasan (from Baghdad), Abu Bakr Bal-Faqih (from Arabia), Ahmad Nazir, Saiyid (from Arabia), Jafar Saqqaf, Saiyid (from Arabia),

From the fourteenth century onwards, there are many references about women Sufi saints. These female Sufi saints not only involved themselves in spiritual teachings but also their main role in the society as mothers, sisters, wives are really noteworthy. They were also supporting their husbands in spreading Sufi principles. There are nine references found to female Sufi saints in Karnataka. The earliest happens to be of Hazrat Masaheba Ashrafe Dojahan who came from Arabia or Baghdad to Kudchi in Raybag taluk of Belgaum district, and second Kunja Maa Bee (the daughter of king Muhammad Shah I, lived in 1358 A.D. to 1375 A.D.).

Hazrata Amina Bibi Dadi Ma Sahiba and Mastana Bibi, Syedani Bibi, Tawakkal Mastan Bibi, Hazrat Saiyida Amma Jaan and Saidani Bibi were the other women played an important role as Sufi saints in teaching and propagation of the Sufi philosophy.

The Sufi saints were very generous and tried to eradicate inequalities in the society. They called to give up evil practices were existing in the both Hindu and Muslims. They received all men from different social strata, rich and poor, Hindu and Muslim, free born and slaves in the same way. They served as socio-religious reformers. One of their great achievements was that they brought the Muslim aristocracy into touch with the Hindus. The Sufis could attract large masses towards them in Karnataka because of their simple life. They served the poor, the distressed and the down-trodden. As Sufism was based on liberal principle it attained fame among the Hindu religionists and Sufi saints became equally respectable to the Hindus and the Muslims. They established khanqhas (monasteries) which played a key role in maintaining the moral balance of the society in Karnataka.

Conclusion

*Bhakti* and Sufi movements were tried to synchronise the Hindu and Muslims and contributed to a growth of stability, vernacular literature, and devotional music in India. Socio-religious life in the medieval period was peaceful despite the camaraderie between Sufi saints and the followers of *Bhakti*.

The massive geographic presence of Islam in India can be explained by the tireless activity of Sufi preachers. Sufism had left a prevailing impact on religious, cultural, and social life in South Asia. The introduction of the mystical form of Islam was done by Sufi saints. Sufi scholars travelling from all over continental Asia were instrumental in the social, economic, and philosophic development of India. Besides preaching in major cities and centres of intellectual thoughts, Sufis reached out to poor and marginalised rural communities and preached in local dialects. Sufism emerged as a “moral and comprehensive socio-religious force” that even influenced other religious traditions. Their traditions of devotional practices and modest living attracted all people. Their teachings of humanity, love for God and Prophet continue to be surrounded by mystical tales and folk songs today. Sufis were firm in abstaining from religious and communal conflict and strived to be peaceful elements of civil society. Many of Sufi saints exercised considerable influence on kings, administrators, nobles and well-to-do persons. They advised the officials of high status to help the weak, the indigent and the needy persons. They gave correct guidance and did not hesitate to express their disapprobation of some of the misdeeds and evil practices of rulers and aristocrats and the masses.
REFERENCES

6. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
22. Ibid, pp. 69-128.