

Role of Sufi Saints in North –Western India

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Abstract

The eighteenth century in Indian History is characterized as an epoch of political anarchy and social chaos that spread unchecked in the wake of the collapse of the Mughal empire. But disintegration of the imperial center and its administrative institutions did not produce any profound effect on the pre-existing pluralistic socio-cultural structure, which was distinguished by widespread Hindu Muslim unity and culture syncretism in northern India.

Keywords- Sufi syncretism, Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti, Miyan Mir

India during the Eighteenth Century

Zahir Uddin Malik states, “The eighteenth century in Indian History is characterized as an epoch of political anarchy and social chaos that spread unchecked in the wake of the collapse of the Mughal empire. But disintegration of the imperial center and its administrative institutions did not produce any profound effect on the pre-existing pluralistic socio-cultural

structure, which was distinguished by widespread Hindu-Muslim unity and culture syncretism in northern India.

Religious ideologies did not play any role in the relentless struggles for political hegemony between prominent regional powers as represented by the Marathas, Jats, Sikhs and Afghans.

Even the foreign invasions launched by the rulers of Afghanistan from Ahmad Shah to Zaman Shah(1748-1800) on the Punjab were inspired more by motives of territorial expansion and plunder of wealth than religious considerations. The armed forces ranged on opposite sides in numerous battles comprised of combatants who belonged to diverse creeds and clans. In the midst of political convulsions and general lawlessness, some seminal sufi movements, like the revival of the Chishti order, took place in Delhi and Punjab. These were matched by the hindu bhakti or pantheistic movement which epitomized the concept of the unity of God, devotion to God, spiritual discipline, religious tolerance and social harmony. These ideas had been propounded by the early Muslim mystics and Hindu bhakti saints, sannyasis and jogis. Many strands of sufi thought, including the concept of Unity of being (wahdat ul wujud), were found compatible with Upanishadic pantheism. In fact, the radiation of sufi-bhakti movements is the finest flower of medieval civilization that preserved the social fabric in a religion- dominated society. The syndrome of mystic modes of life and thinking continued to influence the outlook of people at different societal levels throughout the eighteenth century. These trends were, however, subdued by the perceptible rise of religious nationalism, Hindu and Muslim, in the nineteenth century.” (158)

We seek to explore the salient aspects of socio- religious reformations which was undertaken by the sufi saints (mashaikh), chieft order, in Punjab during the eighteenth century. Their commitment of peaceful religious and moreal rejuvenation was a response to many challenges put up by the political decline for the Muslim community and the Indian society

at large. It also takes into account facets of the Hindu bhakti movement generated independently by the Hindu ascetics and their religious philosophy, mystic thought, rites and practices as well as their impact on people with whom they interacted. Their gospel of devotion to God, Selfrealization and improvement provided the basis for catholic outlook and generous tolerance, which contributed to slowing contemporary squalor and reducing social tensions. The inclusion of their teachings and activities within the framework of the essay is dictated by their reason that these devout bhaktas and pious mendicants had begun to share space with Muslim sufis in the contemporary chronicles, besides a large number of treatises on Hindu religion, philosophy and doctrines. This constituted a distinct trend in the eighteenth century historiographies. (Zahir Uddin Malik, 158)

Mystical Thought and Practice

In this era of post-modernism, materialism and consumerism many people have adopted a hedonistic outlook of life. They find no reason to trouble with the concerns of mysticism, an antibody philosophy underlining the concepts of desirelessness in and detachment from material objects. Even religion, from which mysticism has stemmed, is generally viewed as a fundamental source of civil discord and an easily available instrument for political mobilization. Parallel to this approach to the ideology of mysticism, there is a growing recognition of the omnipresence of the Supreme Being, the wise designer of the universe, the most Gracious and Merciful. The darkening scenario of violence, ethic conflicts and natural calamities as well as trials and tribulation in practical life reveal the truth of Diving will, which asserts its omnipotence at frequent intervals by unmaking what human beings have made to control nature and environment. “The whole ‘universal Reason’ is nothing in the presence of a single divine order.” Though surrounded by unprecedeted wealth and comforts of life, they suffer from depression and want of vision, besides yearning for real inner

tranquility with secure and serene environments. In sequel to such a plight, an inward process of self-realization and self-introspection begins, rekindling man's latent faith in almighty God. It is hoped that this would lead him right onward to adopt submission to the Divine Will on which depends the success of human efforts. This is the message in the Gita and Quran. (Zahir Uddin Malik, 160) In effect, it seeks to prove the futility of a long debate between fate and free will among seekers of true knowledge, about theoretical construct of cause and effect and laws of nature for governance of the universe. Further, the mystic thought and praxis stress the significance of motiveless devotion to God, which leads to lasting peace and enables a person to overcome inertia. This will alone project the path to a virtuous and harmonious social life in the mundane society that is full of distractions and temptations." Verily, man is in loss, except those who believe and do righteous good deeds." Therefore, "Turn in prayers to your Lord and sacrifice to Him alone, "because there is no peace but in remembering God in a humble spirit and contrite heart" (Quran).

The firm belief in the doctrine of unity of God (tauhid), continuous devotion to Him alone and selfless service to his creatures constitute the foundation of mysticism, which is common to every religion. The only differentiation is found in the modes and manners of worshiping God, which have been religiously prescribed by prophets and messengers sent by Him for the spiritual and moral upliftment of mankind. Thus Islamic mysticism (tasawwuf) has come to rest on what Prophet Muhammad defined monotheism, its precepts and attributes as revealed to him and enshrined in the Quran, besides the manner in which he preached and practiced them day and night at home and in public, now categorized shariat. The believers had implicit confidence in his truthfulness and moral soundness as well as in his wisdom and rationality. "The whole of Islam is founded on the love of God and the love of the prophet," writes Khalifa Abdul Hakim.(320-21) But diversity in matters of prayers to God should not be a cause of friction among followers of different religious faiths. The holy Quran explicitly

states, "There is no compulsion in religion, to you be your religion and to me my religion." It further explains the issue of plurality and co-existence of religions in the world in the following words:

We (God) have set for each (group) of you a particular code and path. Had God willed, He could have made you one people (of only one religion), but He tests you by the separate regulations He has made for you... So, (do not lose yourself in these differences but) endeavour to surpass each other through your good deeds.

Thus Islamic mysticism (tasawwuf) is essentially based on the Quran and the traditions of the Prophet, though it absorbed in the course of its movement some influences of local cultures in lands where Islam had spread. It was to adjust with the milieu in which it had come to stay, both in terms of lifestyle and socio-religious ceremonies. Quran defines a Muslim, "those who believe in the unseed establish daily prayers and spend out of what we have given them. The essential nature of unseen is pure light. "God is the light of the heavens and earth." Prophet Muhammad himself used to retire to the cave of hira to meditate for a certain period of time every year. He also performed prayers at night and before dawn, besides five prayers in congregation. The Muslim sufi strove hard to tread the similar esoteric path by patterning his conduct and activities on that of the Prophet. Taha Husain, a leading Arab scholar, has traced beginnings of Sufism to asceticism and found it unobjectionable. He says:

Din is knowledge from God, which knows no limits while modern knowledge, like ancient knowledge, is limited by limitation of human reason.(30)

In quest of inspired knowledge and spiritual perfection, the sufi performs mystic and ascetic exercises. On mountains, hollow caves, desolation and forests, he prays and keeps fast, besides spending days and nights in repetition of God's name (zikr), meditaion and contemplation. In this manner, he suffers all kinds of physical pains in hostile surroundings for years. Having succeeded in achieving spiritual enlightenment or gnosis (marifat) he does not

remain within the limits of his purified soul and does not consider it the end of journey, but feels himself related to all human beings as he is and addresses to humanity in general and in an elan of love. In the supreme moment of the mystical experience, the mystic finds the essence of the creative act of transforming the social order on religious and moral lines. Keeping himself away from contemporary politics, the privileged space for lying and deception, the sufi quietly worked for betterment of the common people at the grass-root level, without politically organizing them or setting up pulblc platforms for his image building. Belief in the Unity of Being (wahdat ul wujud) broadened his outlook and shaped his behavior to treat all human beings with tolerance and sympathy. Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti (1141-1236) of Ajmer, the founder of the Chishti order in India, interpreted reigion in terms of social service and exhorted his disciples to develop river-like generosity, sun-like affection and earth-like hospitality. "The highest form of devotion (ta'at) was to address the misery of those in distress, to fulfill the needs of the helpless and to feed the hungry." (Zahir Uddin Malik, 159)

These cardinal teachings of the most celebrated and distinguidhes sufi saints (Auliya) of India formed the kernel of the entire philosophy of mystic thought and life, which was its very Weltanschauung. In sprcificity, the thrust was on cultivating Qualities of humanism and selfless social sevice to the disadvantaged segments of population, who came into their contact for spiritual blessings. The theoretical concepts of mysticism could make a meaningful impact on the thinking and character of people only if these were backed by practical application and the propounders lived up to the lofty norms. In this context, numerous examples may be illustrated from the lives of saints, which were required to draw inspiration for facing challenging perceptions about spirituality and morality in the modern age.

It is learnt that one Maulana Fakhruddin Dehalvi (1714-1785), son of Shaikh Nizamuddin Aurangbadi (d.1730), planned to embark on the Haj pilgrimage. When he was about to board the ship a women approached him and stated that she had no money to marry

her young daughter or even to feed the family. Hearing her miserable condition, the sufi-scholar gave her the whole amount of money which was meant to cover his expenses for the pilgrimage. Sympathetic to every one, good or bad, soft in speech and cultured in manners, the Shaikh could not see any one in distress and, therefore, always tried to help him with whatever means he had at his disposal. He went to see persons suffering from illness. He also went to express condolence to the bereaved family on the demise of some of its members known to him. Once an Afghan came to his hospice (Khanah) and assaulted him without any provocation. The Shaikhi offered his head saying, "Do whatever you intend to do with it." The Afghan did not strike again and returned. But after sometime he came back, accompanied by a few companions, to do his foul deed. Composed and unperturbed, the Shaikh stood up to welcome and ask their well being. His courteous and peaceful disposition in response to their evil designs made them ashamed. They repented, wept and sought his forgiveness. (Kalikindar Datta, 250)

The tendency towards ecstasy is not essentially the marked characteristic of a true Sufi. The role of a sufi comes to rest on his being an instrument in strengthening the bonds of submission of God through prayers, recitation of God's attributes and doing noble deeds for his fellow beings. The Sufi is not a wielder of magic wand by which he could cure the psychological and bodily ills of people, for God is the true healer and solvent of His creatures' problems. In the words of Maulana Fazal Rehman Ganj Muradabadi (1793-1885) "Sufi is not who flies in air or crosses ocean on foot, or walks on fire, but one who lives and acts in accordance with rules of shariah spontaneously." He himself helped a large number of people financially and socially, by distributing money among the needy, feeding the hungry in his langar and recommending application of jobless person to officers of the district (Kanpur, U.P) which were generally accepted. He himself lived a very simple life, a strict vegetarian, prayed and slept on the some wooden cot.⁹ The portrait of the sufi as healer, magician, physician or

psycheist drawn by some writers is based on erroneous assumptions, which betrays their lack of understanding of the basic principles and practices of Islamic mysticism.(Tara Chand, 50)

Development of Sufism in Punjab

In the medieval times, the region of Punjab was a great centre of long mystical movements. Diverse schools of religious thought were founded by illustrious sufi saints (mashaikh) for wide diffusion of principles and practices of their respective systems. The prominent mystical orders (silsilahs) which won popularity were: The prominent mystical orders (silsilahs) which won popularity were: Suhrawardi order, established by Shaikh Bahauddin Zakariya (d.1262); chishti order, established by Fariduddin Masudd Ganj-i- Shakar (d.1262); and Qadiri order, introduced by shah Niamatullah Qadiri(d.1413). These mystical orders generated spiritual and intellectual ferment throughout the province. They exerted transformational effect on various social classes and professional groups, who were imbued with religious outlook towards life. Compared with other orders, the Qadiri order could not draw to its fold a huge following or strike deep roots anywhere, owing to its puritanical ideas, austere ways of life and simple mode of worship shorn of rituals. It was in the seventeenth century that the order gained fame and recognition in the larger circles of high and low in the regions of Panjab and Kashmir.

The two distinguished saints of the order, Miyan Mir (1550-1635) and his disciple Mulla Shah Badakhshi (1585-1661) made strenuous efforts for its expansion and development and, in the process, profoundly influenced people by their cosmopolitan ideas, altruistic attitude and deep humanism. (Zahir Uddin Malik, 163)

Miyan Mir was a symbol of piety, learning and humanism. He espoused the lofty ideals of humanity, forbearance, sincerity and truthfulness. By the example of his pious life, he helped and guided ignorant people in moral rectitude. He led a most frugal and temperate life and subsisted on simple diet. He exhorted his disciples to pursue the three golden principles, viz

little food, little speech and little sleep. When he was absorbed in players he felt no desire for food and remained without it for days and nights. He defined an ideal mystic as one who lived in society and inspired consoled, infused faith and confidence in the deprived and destitute. Miyan Mir's relations with contemporary Sikh Gurus were cordial and he cultivated friendly contacts with

Guru Arjun Dev and Guru Hargobind. Along with other religious leaders of the place, he visited Guru Arjun Dev in prison where he had been put by the orders of Jahangir and praised his piety and noble acts of service for the downtrodden. According to the Sikh tradition, Mian Mir had been requested by Guru Arjun Dev to lay the foundation of the Golden Temple at Amritsar. Mulla Shah Badakhshi also preached the gospel of brotherhood, tolerance and austerity. He is reported to have given the following sermon to all those who came to seek his spiritual blessings for materialization of their worldly objects:

Without doing any good deeds you want to solve your difficulties through Sufi's (derweshs). It is not right. Feed the hungry, give clothes to the naked and fulfill the needs of the needy, and God will certainly all your desires. (Zahir Uddin Malik, 163).

Revival of the Chishti Order

Khwaja Nur Muhammaad Maharvi (1730-1790), the most favoured disciple of Maulana Fakhruddin Dehalvi (d. 1780), revived the traditions of the Chishti order that had fallen into shade in Punjab after the demise of Baba Farid (d. 1262). In the intervening period strong centres of the Suhrawardi and Naqshbandi orders had emerged at Multan and Sirhind. The credit for the regeneration and re-establishment of the chishti order, therefore, goes to Khwaja Nur Muhammad, a renowned saint and scholar, who was immensely popular with the people. During his times momentous changes in politics and socio-economic structure were taking place, causing strife and disorders in society. He belonged to a poor family of cultivator

in the village of chotala, where he was born on 2 April 1730. He received his early education in a school at the neighbouring village of Mahar. For higher education he went to several places like Dera Ghazi Khan and Lahore. Ultimately he went to Delhi and joined the *madrasah* of Ghaziuddin Khan, where he studied under Maulana Fakhruddin Dehalvi and acquired esoteric and exoteric knowledge. Through hard and painful struggle, he acquired education and became an accomplished scholar who was acknowledged by the learned divines (*ulema*) of this famous seminary. Highly impressed by his erudition and pious character, Maulana Fakhruddin Dehalvi initiated him as his disciple and instructed him to settle at Mahar (a village four *kos* in the west of Pak Pattan) and to establish a Chishti hospice (*khanqah*) there. In compliance with the wishes of his teacher, he took up his abode at Mahar and, in the right earnest, set out to propagate the ideals of mysticism in resonance with the Chishti order. He explained in clear and unequivocal terms the spiritual aspects of religion and portrayed its true and authentic image. He unreservedly addressed the spiritual and worldly concerns of the people who thronged round him. His high spiritual status, profound learning and deep sympathy for the poor appealed to the people, who joined his mystic circle for spiritual guidance. In a short time, he gained enormous influence among the people and his *khanqah* emerged as a strong centre of sufism in Punjab. The accent of his message was on raising the moral standards to higher levels, cultivating self-restraint and tolerance, which he deemed essential for a peaceful and harmonious social life. He advised that one should take initiative in appeasing and reconciling the person who had quarreled with him.

He stressed that reforming and serving the fellow being was the highest form of worship to god. He never acted against the commands of his spiritual mentor (*pir*) whom he held in great reverence. The relationship between them was not of a master and slaves, but it was based purely on mutual love and affection. He kept himself out of the vortex of current politics and endeavoured vigorously for expansion and progress of the Chishti order. On

account of his exertion, a number of new centres were established at such places as Taunsa, Ahmadpur, Chachran, Sakhad, Siyal and Golarah.(Zahir Uddin Malik, 164)

The spiritual and moral mission of the Chishti order, thus inaugurated by Khwaja Nur Muhammad in Punjab, was further carried to great heights by his disciple and successor (*khalaifa*) Khwaja Sulaiman, taunsavi, an eminent saint and scolar. Having educated and trained him on the mystic path for six years, Khwaja Nur Muhammad awarded him with his succession (*khilafat*) at the age of 22 and asked him to settle at Taunsa, which would be the future centre of his religious reforms and social work. With his arrival, the desolated land of Sangar and Taunsa turned into a populous and prosperous settlement full of mosques, seminaries (*madrashs*) and markets. Dedicated to learning and teaching, he established several schools (*madrasahs*) for the dissemination of spiritual and scholastic knowledge among the common folks of towns and villages in the area of his influence. In the main school of the new town, at least fifty teachers were engaged in imparting religious education with an emphasis on jurisprudence in which the saint had attained distinction. He himself gave regular discourses on different subjects of theology and spirituality, which were attended by a large number of students and theologians. At this time, the province of the Panjab had passed under the sway of the Sikhs, which created feelings of insecurity and alienation among the local Muslims. He dispelled their fears and infused confidence by them with absolute faith in the mercy of Almighty God, the sole protector and preserver of mankind. He cautioned the Muslims against embarking on armed revolt because they seemed to him militarily weak, politically disintegrated and socially stratified. He thought that political power, evwn if regained, would not last for long unless its holders were animated with virtues of personal piety, social justice and benevolence for all.¹⁸ He argued that the solution of curret problems facing the Muslims lay in the invigoration of true faith and firmly following the norms and

laws prescribed by the *shariat*. Cruel rulers were imposed by God on people as punishment for the grave sins repeatedly committed by them. (Zahir Uddin Malik, 165)

Unruffled by repercussion of political events, Khwaja Sulaiman Taunsai remained steadfast in the pursuit of his agenda of socio-religious reform through preaching and teaching. He succeeded in reversing the entrenched mindset and transforming the character of thousands of ignorant and egoistic people of Punjab and Afghanistan who belonged to different social strata. He urged them to eschew violence, to avoid the company of wicked persons and clerics who were hypocrites, to forsake drinking wine, to give up taking bribes and to shun the bad habits of backbiting, faultfinding and jealousy. They should develop noble virtues of hospitality, honesty and humility. They should develop noble virtues of hospitality, honesty and humility. They should treat their neighbours and fellow beings with sympathy and affection. He believed that indiscipline, disobedience to parents and distorted customs prevailing in families would have adverse effects on the moral fibre of the entire society. Thus, orderly functioning of family as an institution would reinforce bonds of mutual relationship between classes and groups in the society. A sufi of cosmopolitan outlook, he had a deep regard for the holy men of other religious faiths. In his lectures, he urged his followers to keep peaceful and brotherly relations with Hindus even under trying circumstances. He maintained a large free kitchen(larger) which provided not only food, but also other necessities of life – clothes, medicines, blankets and shoes-to all those residing in the convert (khanqah). They comprised students, disciples, travelers and mendicants, numbering nearly five hundred persons. Uncalled charity (futuh) offered by believers, poor and opulent, was the only source of income to meet the expenditure of the establishment, for he never accepted landendowments or any amount of money from the Nawab of Bahawalpur and other zamindars of the region. When the flow of offerings stopped, all those dependent on it, including the saint and his family, were on the verge of starvation. He lived very simple and contented life. Whatever

reached him in the form of unsolicited offerings (futuh) was distributed without delay among the poor and needy. He propounded that renunciation of material objects did not include food, water, clothes and shelter, which were essential to keep the body alive as well as to worship God. Nor withdrawal from worldly affairs was construed to mean non-performance of family responsibilities.

Maintaining and supporting families was a noble virtue recognized by mystics. (Zahir Uddin Malik, 165)

Khwaji Muhammad Aqil (d.1814) was the grandson of Khwaja Nur Muhammad and son of Makhdum Sharif. He assumed the leadership of the Chishti order in his capacity as a distinguished successor (khalifa) of Khwaja Nur Muhammad. Following the example of his grandfather, Khwaja Muhammad Aqil worked consistently and vigorously for the expansion and consolidation of the order to which he swore allegiance. He had set up khanqahs at Charchran, Kotmattan and Ahmadpur which became centres of learning, culture, Kotmattan and Ahmadpur which became centres of learning, culture, solace and guidance for aspirants on the path of spirituality. He kindled in them deep love and devotion towards God as well as belief in the validity of the canonical laws (shariat), the source of religious faith and moral values. For exposition and clear understanding of mystical thought and philosophy, the classical works of Ibn-i-Arabi, Ghazzali and Jami were systematically taught in the schools established and administered by this devout sufi. Besides theoretical discourses about the nature of sufism, the nature of God and world, special attention was paid to the teaching of scholastic theology, jurisprudence and Hadis. This was done to equip a future mystic for giving legal opinions on social matters and resolve theological disputations.

Conforming to the traditions of his spiritual preceptors, he maintained a community to the traditions of his supply of free food to the residents of the hospice (khanqah) and other poor and hungry persons. He explained in detail the methods and paths which could be

followed by an novice to attain divine grace in many unique ways. He insisted on the importance of self-control and selfdiscipline. He asked the disciples never to give vent to anger, nor bear malice towards any one. They were advised to be friendly and compassionate, besides working for the welfare of all creatures.(Zahir Uddin Malik, 166)

Saints and Bhaktas

Amongst the many contemporary saints and bhaktas, the most celebrated seem to be those who sprang from the lowest rung in the socio-economic scale, felt concerned for the woes of the common folks, worked for their spiritual uplift and liberated them from shackles of superstition, priesthood and liberated them from shackles of superstition, priesthood and caste restraints. In a period when the political horizon was overcast with clouds of civil was, social chaos and moral debasement, the mystics inspired the urban poor and toiling peasants with faith in Almighty God and in higher moral values of simplicity, honesty and contentment that sustained them through vicissitudes of life and saved them from the general effects of prevailing strife and tension. These saints stood like a bride between the two apparently mutually antagonistic religious creeds and sought to effect reconciliation on both spiritual and social planes. From the commencement of eighteenth century, the contemporary scholars and historians, affected by their ideas of enlightenment and eclecticism, invariably devoted a section in their historical accounts to beliefs and custom of the Hindus, besides the distinct practices of the Sannyasis, Jogis and Bairagis. The number of books on Hinduism, either originally written or transcribed from old translation, seems to be quite large. Ancient Indian literature, which was written in Persian, touched the highest watermark and lent splendor to the prodigious cultural heritage of India. It was made accessible to the Persian knowing persons not only in Persia and Central Turkistan, but also Western Europe, long before its masterpieces were rendered into English, German and French. (Zahir Uddin Malik, 168)

At the turn of eighteenth century Mirza Fakhruddin, at the suggestion of Kokaltash Khan (foster brother of the Mughal Emperor Jahandar Shah) complied an encyclopaedia entitled *Tuhfatul-Hind* in 1708-10. It was devoted on the themes of Indian philosophy, languages, music and arts. Ali Muhammad Khan, the author of *Mirat-i-hmadi*, had briefly narrated innumerable Hindu castes, sub-castes, temples and shrines including Somnath. His account is authentic and unbiased reflecting his clear and sympathetic comprehension of these subjects. Another valuable work containing a detailed narrative of Hindu religious philosophy, creeds, traditions, customs, sects and festivals is *Haft Tamasha*, written by Mirza Hasan Qtil in 1793. Other Persian works dealing with the beliefs and practices of Sannyasis, Jogis and Bairagis are *Chaha Gulshan* of Rai Chatuman,

Mira-i-Aftab Numa of Abdur Rehman, *Tarih-i-Farrukhabad* of M R Waliullah. Shaikh Muhammad Inayatullah was born at Qsur in the district of Lahore in the seond half of seventeenth contury and died in1735. His parents were Arains or petty cultivators, who were originally Hindus but had converted to Islam. After completing his eduction, he migrated to Lahore where he established a college for higher studies in the religious philosophy and spiritual practices of the Qadiri and other mystic orders. He was a Qadiri-Shattari sufi, a scholar and writer. He was well versed in different methods prescribed by Hindu thinkers of ancient times for the attainment of salvation. A prolific writer, some of his works are *Dastur-ul-Amal*, *Islah-ul Amal*, *Lataif Ghibia*,

Irshad-ul-Talibib and a commentary on the Holy Quran. Shaikh Muhammad Inayatullah was the spiritual guide (hadi) of Bulleh Shah (1680-1757), the foremost sufi poet of Punjab and the most distinguished pantheistic saint of the region, who left and indelible mark of his mystic vision on the minds of the Punjabis. His relatives induced him to give up the company his mentor on account of his low social origin and heterodoxy, but Bulleh Shah remained firm and continued to receive spiritual guidance from him.

The real name of Bulleh Shah (1680-1757) was Abdullaah and was born at Pandoke in Qasur, near Lahore. The name of his teacher was Maulv Ghulam Murtaza, a native of Qasur. It was he who chose Shah Inayat Qairi Shattari of Lahore as his spiritual guide who, in turn appointed him his spiritual successor (khalifa). He was deeply influenced by the Vaishnava Vedantic Bhakti and the yogic practices. Lajwanti Rama Krishna and Mohan Singh hold that this influence is vividly reflected in his religious thought under the following categories: (a) The adoration of Prophet Muhammad on the pattern on which Vaishanavas adore Lord Krishna, (b) the identification of the spiritual guide with God, (c) wifely devotion, (d) the practice of concentrating on controlling of breath (trikuti) and hearing of unstruck sound (anahat shabd), (e) monism and (f) transmigration of soul. S.R. Sharda writes, "In some of the verses the Vaishnava colour is so dominant that one hesitates to admit him as the compositions of a Mohammadan.

The vocabulary, the metaphors, atmosphere and the thought all are Vaishnava." (Malik, 169) For instance, Bulleh Shah said:

When Lord Krishna sounded the flute and I heard its voice, sayeth Bulleh Shah, I cried in agony and since then I am wailing in pain of separation. Bulleh, the Gopi, turned mad and ran towards

Lord Krishna. The Gopi asks where else she should go.

In these verses, Bulleh Shah has expressed profound sentiments of reverence and love for Prophet Muhammad as incarnation of God, a position not assigned to him in Islamic religion. The Prophet declared himself only a messenger to convey and preach the Divine message to mankind. But Bulleh Shah thought that God himself disguised as Prophet and appeared on the earth. With regard to the efficacy of Yogic practices as means to achieve communion with God, Bulleh Shah says,

To attain Thee I have controlled breath, I have shut all the nine gates and have reached the tenth one. I pray Thee, accept my love.

His concept of Karma or the theory that success, material or spiritual, is a direct consequence of one's noble acts in any field of enterprise is based on the Hindu Law, according to which the good conduct relates to the previous life on the individual and not to the present condition. Says he:

Vision of God is denied to him because of his bad action in his previous lives, i.e. before his birth.

He believed in the unity of God, the Supreme Reality, to whose will he made absolute surrender. "I verily dance at Thy will and the idea of oneness has been removed from myself." But the realization of God could not be dawned on a person without his prior grace. "If justice is done,

I am doomed. I therefore pray Thee for Thy grace, so that I may be saved." About the creation of universe and interpretation of the idea of Prophethood of Muhammad, he says:

When the one was single and alone, there was no light manifest. There was neither God nor the Tyrant. The beloved one wearing the costumes came and Adam got his name fixed. From the one, Ahmad was made. He said Kun and Faikun was. So out of likeness, He created likeness.

In Ahad, He inserted MIM (i.e. produced Ahmad) and then made the universe." (SR Sharda, 151)

A Rajput of Nerivana caste, Sivanarayan was born in Chandavan Village in Ghazipur district where the sect of Siva Narayan, founded by him, flourished during the first half of eighteenth century. He was a prolific writer with eleven works in Hindi to his credit. He professed the adaptation of one Creator, the Lord of the world, opposed caste system, superstitious attachment to the holy relics of Hindus and Muslims, besides polygamy. He laid

stress on the cultivation of such cardinal virtues of puritan life (*sadh*) as truth, temperance and mercy. He taught that to attain total illumination, one should act religiously in relationships involved in social behavior under all circumstances. His popularity and influence spread far and wide. This ultimately gave him access to the Mughal court at Delhi. The reigning monarch Muhammad Shah (1719-1748), impressed by his Unitarian philosophy, piety and knowledge, became his disciple. Sivanarayan admitted into his fold members of diverse creeds and communities, granting latitude in observing some customary practices in which they were steeped prior to conversion. A simple ceremony took place for admitting a person into the sect. The Siva Narayans assembled at the residence of some senior member on a fixed date, placed the sacred book in the center of the gathering, along with betel and sweetmeats. After the recitation of selected passages from the sacred text, these things were distributed among those who were present there. The novice was declared a legitimate of the sect.(HH Wilson, 200)

A disciple of Udhaya Das, Birbhan was an inhabitant of Brijhasir, near Narnaul, in the province of Delhi. He composed couplets (dohas) in Hindi in the style of Kabir. These were recited in the religious congregations of his followers known as Sadhs or the ure. This sect of Sadhus, though founded in the year 1658, was fully developed in the eighteenth century and enjoyed esteem and influence in the country. They had no temples but assembled at stated periods in houses on every full moon. Men and women brought their food and ate together, besides listening to the recitation of verses composed by Birbhan as well the poems of Kabir, Nanak and Dadu. Some idea of his pantheistic views may be obtained from the following verses.(Zahir Uddin Malik, 170)

Acknowledge but one God who made and can destroy you, to whom there is none superior, and to whom alone therefore is worship due, not to earth, nor stone, nor metal, nor wood, nor trees, nor any created things.

Be modest and humble, set no affection on the world.

Never lie nor speak ill to, or of qanu thing/ Listen not to evil discourse, nor to anything but the praises of the creator, not to tales, nor gossip, nor calumny, nor music, nor singing, except hymns.

Never covet any thing, either of body or wealth, take not of another, God is the giver of all things, as your trust is in Him so shall you receive.

Use of intoxicating substances, chewing pan, smoking tobacco are forbidden. Bow not down your head in the presence of idols or men.(Malik, 171)

Dadhray was born (1771) in a poor Brahman Family at village Dharsu in the Narnaul district. He held the doctrine of monotheism, regarding God as one, the Supreme Reality, all beautiful, incomparable and all-pervading. He opposed image worship, disapproved caste restrictions and raised his voice against Purdah. He tried to show the similarity and identity between Hinduism and Islam, pointing out the common features in the two streams of religious thought. He also sought to prove that all religions, though apparently dissimilar, are essentially the same and, therefore, underscores the idea of unity in plurality. Every thing emanated from the fountain of Godhead. The stage of spiritual illumination could be reached by self-negation, denial of one's own self, knowledge of his own essence, ceaseless and intense devotion. His monotheistic teachings attracted a large number of people in Jhajpur, Narnaul and Gurgaon areas. Monotheism was the common features of the religious thought of these saints and preachers in the eighteenth century. A note of monotheism may be found in the devotional songs of Ram Prasad Sen, a devout worshipper of Goddess Kali, who lived in Begnal in this period. He says:

What is the need of making idols of metal, stone or clay;

You make an image and place it one the throne of your heart.(Datta, 6)

Pran Nath was the most outstanding saint (bhakta) among the Hindu pantheists of the period who projected esoteric mysticism as a living moral force. Such thinkers sought to demonstrate, by their mystic vision and devotional fervor, that direct contact or the union of human spirit with the Divine Being and their transformation of duality into unity were possible to achieve, if the seekers after truth adopted their religious ways and practices Sampradaya, a liberal and reformist movement in north India during the eighteenth century. He wrote *Kulzum Sarup* in the Gujarathi language in which he attempted to show that the ideals of the Indian cosmogony and certain other esoteric aspects of Vedantic philosophy, as contained in the Upanishads, are similar to those embodied in the holy Quran and, in this manner, tried to prove the essential harmony between the two great religious systems. (Tara Chand, 111) He believed in one God, denounced the formalities and superstitions among the Hindu as well as Muslims, condemned the caste system and laid stress on the nobility of Karma. Due to his catholicity and egalitarian outlook, he had acquired a great influence over Chhatrasal Bundela, by affecting the discovery of a diamond mine. Zahir Uddin

Malik observes, “The contemporary Muslim historians call him by the name of Ruhulla and hold that he was a popular saint of Bundelkhand. Through his contact with the saint, Raja Chhatrasal developed great regard for Islam and its Prophet in whose praise he recited two couplets every morning after taking bath. According to Murtaza Husain, the Quran and the Puranas were placed on high tables on opposite sides in the private chamber of the Raja’s palace. On each side there sat Muslim ulema and Hindu of God (tauhid). He lived in Panna till the end of his life and, on his death, he was buried and not cremated. At the ceremony of initiation, the followers of his sect, including Hindus and Muslims of different social rank, assembled and ate food together.”(172) Bibliography

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