

SUFISM

AN INTRODUCTION



F A R I D A K H A N A M

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Contents

1	<i>The Origin and Evolution of Sufism</i>	7
2	<i>The Early Development</i>	21
3	<i>Towards Mysticism</i>	31
4	<i>The Formative Period</i>	53
5	<i>The Chishti Order</i>	63
6	<i>The Qadri Order</i>	108
7	<i>The Suhrawardi Order</i>	132
8	<i>The Naqshbandi Order</i>	149
9	<i>The Firdausi Order</i>	180
10	<i>The Sufi Concept of Meditation</i>	193
11	<i>Tasawwuf Today</i>	215
12	<i>Glossary</i>	221
13	<i>Index</i>	230
14	<i>Selected Bibliography</i>	241

Introduction

This book is a historical study of Sufism (*Tasawwuf*) with specific reference to its spread throughout the Indian subcontinent. It deals with the major Sufi orders, their distinguishing features and the ideology and method of Sufism. The aim of *Tasawwuf*, to put it briefly, is to attain the realization of God. The realization of God produces all kinds of spiritual qualities. Although the term *Tasawwuf* came into vogue as late as the 2nd century A.H., *Tasawwuf* was actually integral to the believer's life from the very beginning. *Tasawwuf* is, in fact, another name for the Islamic realization of God.

In later periods of Islamic history, the propagation of Islam all over the world was due less to the spread of the Muslim empire than to the efforts made by the Sufis. The greatest feat of the Sufis has been the development, by dint of great striving, of a version of Islam which has been found acceptable to all. This version of Islam is free of all negative features such as hatred, the desire for revenge, and the urge to perpetrate violence. It is characterized rather by love, compassion and charitableness. This is why Sufism became so popular in the medieval world. If the ruling class can take credit for the political expansion of Islam, the Sufis can take credit for the spiritual spread of Islam.

In respect of method, *Tasawwuf* places great emphasis on meditation. The Sufis held that, in reality, meditation existed in the form of reflection, contemplation and pondering in the days of the Prophet and his companions. However, the Sufis developed it into a discipline. Generally, religious scholars

regard it as a deviation from the real Islam, but the Sufis do not subscribe to their views. They think that meditation facilitates the attainment of the higher stages of *Tazkia*, (purification of the self) *Ihsan* (excellence in worship) and *Maarifah* (realization of God)—the goal of Islam.

A glossary of Sufi terms has also been provided.

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The Origin and Evolution of Sufism

The meaning of the term Sufi

Sufism (*tasawwuf*) is the name given to mysticism in Islam. The term Sufism embraces the philosophy and practices which aim at direct communion between God and man, and those who practice Sufism are called Sufis.

Scholars differ as to the derivation of the term Sufi, for it is not mentioned in the Qur'an or the books of *hadith*, nor does it figure in the standard Arab dictionaries that were compiled as late as the 8th century A.D. According to Qushayri (d. 465/1074), author of *al Risala*, the word Sufi was used as a generic term to describe individuals adopting a particular religious attitude based on austerity and spirituality, and came into usage only at the beginning of the 9th century. This he explains simply: 'After the Prophet Muhammad, *sahabi* (companion) was the only title given to the Muslims of that period. This was the highest title for them, and they therefore required no other title for their piety and religiosity. The next generation that received religious education directly from the *sahaba* was called *tabiin* (followers of the companions), while the title *taba tabiin* (followers of the followers of the companions) was the title given to those who had received religious training from the *tabiin*.' According to Khaliq Ahmad Nizami¹, those who devoted their lives to religious studies and religious devotion after the times of the *tabii* were called *zahid* – 'the pious' - and *abid* – 'the servant (of Allah)'. It is

¹ See Nizami, A.K.

only in relation to the succeeding generations that one comes across the term Sufi. According to Abdur Rahman Jami², who quotes earlier sources, the first spiritualist to be given the title of Sufi was Shaykh Abu Hashim Kufi (d. 776).³

Let us examine the etymological meaning and origin of the term *Sufi*. It is made up of three Arabic letters: *s- w- f*, but there is much scholarly dispute surrounding it. One view is that the word Sufi is derived from the Arabic word *saf*, which means *line* or *row*, referring here to those early Muslim contemporaries of the Prophet who stood in the first row during prayer, having reached the mosque well in time. Others contend that the word is derived from the word *suffa*, the *verandah* or *porch* of the Prophet's mosque in Madinah. The traditions say that a number of the companions of the Prophet who had no home stayed in this verandah. They spent their time in worship, in learning by heart the verses of the Qur'an and memorizing the words of the Prophet. They disengaged themselves from worldly activities. The Prophet and his companions looked after their needs. Since the porch of the mosque had virtually become their home, they came to be called *Ashaab-i Suffa* or 'People of the Porch'. However, the majority of the scholars are of the opinion that the word Sufi comes from the word *suf*, or wool. This is because most of the early pious people were inclined to asceticism and wore undyed, coarse woolen garments. The rough cloth symbolized voluntary poverty and renunciation of the world with all its pleasures.

² see Abdur Rahman Jami, *Nafahatu'l Uns*, Teheran, 1337/1918-19, pp. 31-32. Abdur Rahman Jami was a prominent Sufi of the Naqshbandi order (see the chapter on the Naqshbandi order in this book)

³ see Rizvi, S.A.A., *A History of Sufism in India*, Vol. I, Delhi, 1975, p.31; and Dar, B.A., *Early Sufis*, in Sharif, M.M., *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, Delhi, 1961, p.336

The Beginnings of Sufism

The Sufis trace the origin of Sufism or *tasawwuf* to the Prophet of Islam. They believe that there were two dimensions to the revelations received by the Prophet: one took the form of the words of the Qu'ran, the other that of the divine inspiration within his heart. The former was meant for all, while the latter was to be imparted to the chosen few and conveyed directly 'from heart to heart'. 'Book knowledge' or the knowledge of the words of the Qur'an and *hadith* was known as *ilm-e-safina*, while 'the knowledge of the heart' was known as *ilm-e-sina*. The religious scholars or *ulama* (sing. *alim*) were experts in the knowledge of the Qur'an and *hadith*, but it was claimed that 'the knowledge of the heart' remained with those called the Sufis.

The claim of the Sufis that *tasawwuf* had its source in the life of the Prophet and his companions is based on certain facts. The Prophet led an extremely simple life. He avoided all luxuries. Any valuable presents received by him were immediately disposed of in charity. His personal possessions, even at the time when the whole of Arabia acknowledged his supremacy, comprised of no more than an ordinary mattress to sleep on and a pitcher to keep water in. He fasted for months on end and slept little preferring to spend the major portion of the night in prayers (73:20). His very life was the proof and the example of his knowledge and commitment to both the theoretical concepts of Islam as well as its everyday practice.

The faith and practice of Islam is made up of three elements, which together form the basis of Islamic religion. These are: *iman*, or belief in the revealed word of God; *itaah*, or compliance with the *shahaadah* (Islamic creed); and *ihsan*, or the practice of virtue and sincerity. Umar, a companion of the Prophet and the second Caliph, narrates a tradition, which elucidates

these three elements: “One day when we were with the Prophet of God, there came to him a man whose clothes were of an exceeding whiteness, and his hair was of an exceeding blackness, nor were there any signs of travel upon him. Although none of us had seen him before, he sat down opposite the Prophet. He asked the Prophet to tell him what is meant by surrender to God (*Islam*). The Prophet answered: ‘The surrender is that you should say prayers five times, fast during Ramadan, pay zakat and, if you can, go on the pilgrimage to the Sacred house (the Kabah).’ He said: ‘You have spoken truly.’ We were amazed that, having questioned the Prophet, he should corroborate what he said.

“Then he said: ‘Tell me what faith (*iman*) is.’ Then the Prophet said: ‘It is that you should believe in God, in angels and the books, the prophets and the Last Day, and you should believe that no good or evil comes but by His providence.’ ‘You have spoken truly,’ he said. Then he said, ‘Tell me what excellence, *ihsan*, is.’ The Prophet answered, ‘It is that you should worship God as if you saw Him, or if you do not see Him, truly, He sees you.’ Then the stranger went away. Umar Farooq, the Prophet’s companion, says that he stayed there long after that person had gone, until the Prophet said to him, ‘O Umar, do you know who the questioner was?’ He said, ‘God and His Prophet know best, but I do not know at all.’ ‘It was Gabriel,’ said the Prophet. ‘He came to teach you your religion.’”

The Sufis lay most emphasis on *ihsan*. Put most simply, *ihsan* can be described as that level of devotion at which the devotee is completely absorbed in the worship of God. The Sufis strongly believe that there are many levels of excellence in the actual practice of *ihsan*, and the objective of the Sufi practice is to raise this level of excellence. That is why they define true *ihsan* as the attainment of that level of devotion at which one begins to experience the presence of God.

The Qur'an indeed lays down that the path of virtue lies between hope and fear. It is very clear on this point when it says: "And pray to Him with fear and hope; His mercy is within reach of the righteous." (7:55). However, according to the Sufi definition, consciousness of the fact that the Lord is watching our every movement and knows the innermost recesses of our hearts corresponds only to the lower level of devotion and prayer. When one is conscious of God's ever-watchful eye, one cannot but desist from evil actions. It is in this sense that prayer keeps us from indecency and evil, as stated in the Qur'an. (29:45)

However, only a prayer inspired by true intention (*niyat*) can yield the desired result. Some merely wish to lead a pious life aimed at salvation in the next life. This is the first level of piety: God is watching us and, as a result, we desist from sin. Some aim at experiencing Him face to face in this life. This is the second level of piety according to the Sufis. Thus, when one whose heart is filled with love of God prostrates himself before Him and at that moment has the experience of seeing God face to face, this state of total absorption results in ecstasy.

The Sufis strive for and attest to having the experience of seeing God, Whom they call their Beloved One, face to face. There are instances of Sufis falling senseless when possessed by the ecstasy of extreme love. The Sufis say that the Prophet and some of his companions were totally absorbed in their prayers every time they prayed and that this complete absorption in prayer is the foundation of *tasawwuf*.

According to the Sufis this higher level of excellence in worship, which might lead to ecstasy, may be achieved through *dhikr*. *Dhikr* literally means remembering God. The Qur'an says "Remember God always so that you may prosper." (62:10) At yet another place, it says: "Believers, be ever

mindful of God: praise Him morning and evening.” (33:41-42). The Sufis gave *dhikr* a formal, well-defined shape by attaching greater importance to its popular rather than the Qur’anic meaning. They invented a number of ways for calling out the name of God—silently, loudly, and even accompanied by music or the beating of drums—as a means of achieving their goal.

The Ulama, representing the orthodox point of view, objected to the Sufis giving such great importance to the mere recitation or chanting of the words of the Qur’an. They held that for the understanding of the message of Islam, it is not the recitation of the words which is important, but rather the spirit of prayer, the attachment to God, and the willingness to surrender one’s will to His will by pursuing and reflecting upon the meaning of the divine words. And that when the spirit is fully observed, the desired spiritual benefit can be achieved from the words of the Qur’an.

Sufi links with Orthodoxy

The Sufis, like all other followers of Islam, consider the Prophet Muhammad to be the most perfect embodiment of their ideas and beliefs, and trace the roots of Sufism back to his life. Indeed, the life of the Prophet of Islam does provide a Sufi with a perfect example to follow. The traditions narrate a life of poverty, sincerity, submission to God’s will, deep devotion, contemplation, nightlong vigils and prayers, nearness to God, divine inspiration and other-worldly visions. Though there are also traditions that tell us that the Prophet discouraged people from spending all their time in ritual worship and admonished them for not taking any interest in worldly activities, the Sufis do not consider these *hadith* very relevant. They rather link themselves to those companions of the Prophet who lived in the porch of the mosque of Madinah, more bent on total devotion than the pursuit of

worldly affairs, and prefer to remember the fact that both the Prophet and his companions supported them and saw to it that they did not lack the necessities of life. This shows that the Prophet did not disapprove of their full-time engagement in acts of worship.

The Sufis always laid emphasis on *safa*⁴, that is, purification. The Qur'an has this to say: "He indeed shall be successful who purifies himself" (87:14) and 'He will indeed be successful who purifies his soul, and he will indeed fail who corrupts his soul.'" (91:9-10)

We learn from the Qur'an that God made the human soul perfect and endowed it with an understanding of what is right and wrong (91:7-8) But, unfortunately, human life being a trial, it is beset with pitfalls and the soul is corrupted during its sojourn on earth. To bring it back to its pristine state requires purification. This action is most pleasing to God, for it shows a desire to return to and follow the path laid down by Him. Thus the purification of the soul is essential to attain divine approval.

The only way to win divine approval and become one with the divine will is to sacrifice one's life for God: the rite of purification is a necessary step for one who wants to follow this way. The Sufis call this way a spiritual path, the path of those "others who would give away their lives in order to find favour with God. God is compassionate to His servants." (2:207)

The Sufi way (Tariqa)

In Sufism, therefore, there is the road (sing. *tariqa*, pl. *turuq*; this term went on to refer a Sufi order) and mystic travel, or *suluk*. One who undertakes a journey along this road is called a *salik*, or traveller. The mystical

⁴ Indeed, some scholars tried mistakenly to link the term *Sufi* with the word *safa*, or purity.

path is, in principle, open to every one. According to the Sufis anybody can attain the higher forms of religious knowledge, but if one is to do it the Sufi way, it must be done under the guidance of a *shaykh*, also called a *murshid* or *pir*. The *salik* receives the rite of initiation from his *shaykh* or *murshid*, who in turn has received it from his *shaykh* and so on, with the chain of transmission of spiritual influence (*barakah*) going back to the Prophet himself. The Sufis believe that the Prophet conferred this right on only some of his companions, in particular the caliphs Abu Bakr and Ali, who in turn passed it on to their followers. In this way, this right has been passed on in unbroken succession up to the present day. This chain of succession is known in Arabic as *silsila*⁵, and it is a living tradition transmitted personally from master to disciple. A disciple is thus above all a seeker, or *talib*⁶, then a traveller, or *salik*, and finally, if God so pleases, a gnostic, or *arif*. But the spiritual realization cannot be achieved without the initiation, counsel, and guidance of the *shaykh*, or spiritual master.

Those aspiring to follow the Sufi path approach a *shaykh* to be initiated into a spiritual lineage or, *silsila*. As every lineage goes back to the Prophet, all the orders (*silsilas*) are necessarily traced to one or the other of the companions whom the Prophet initiated himself. In the early phase of Sufism there were many great Sufi masters and they had their followers, but the movement was not institutionalized. The regular orders began to be established only in the 11th and 12th century AD and the first great Sufi order was the Qadri order, or *tariqa*, founded by Shaykh Abdul Qadir Jilani (1071-1166). This was followed by the Suhrawardi order of Abu'l Najib Suhrawardi (1098-1168) and the Naqshbandi order of Khwaja Baha' ud din Naqshbandi

⁵ *silsila* is a term, besides *tariqa* which is used to describe a Sufi order or a Sufi lineage.

⁶ from the Arabic root, t-l-b, to seek

(1318-1389). Another great order, the Chishti order, traces its origin to Chisht near Herat, where the spiritual founder of the order, Khwaja Abu Ishaq Shami (d. 940) dwelled. However it was Muinuddin Chishti (d.1236) who brought the *silsila* to India and laid its foundations by establishing a flourishing centre in Ajmer.

Both the physical and the spiritual life of a Sufi revolves around his *shaykh* and the *shaykh* dispenses any guidance his disciple might require, starting from the exigencies of everyday life and ending with the spiritual guidance that aims at losing oneself in God. Such guidance is personalized and tailored to the individual capacities and needs of the disciple, gradually introducing him to techniques that would effectively enable him to attain the spiritual goal. Of these techniques the most numerous are those pertaining to *dhikr* – remembrance of God.

Dhikr

Dhikr literally means ‘remembering’ God. The Qur’an attaches the utmost importance to remembering God by invoking His name. ‘Remember your Lord and dedicate yourself to Him utterly.’ (73:8). ‘Truly, in the remembrance of God, hearts find rest.’ (13:28) ‘Remember Me and I shall remember you.’ (2:152). The Qur’an further explains: ‘Remember God always, so that you may prosper.’ (62:10), admonishes: “Believers, be ever mindful of God: praise Him morning and evening,” (33:41) and instructs: ‘Prayer fends off lewdness and evil. But your foremost duty is to remember God.’ (29:45)

The Sufis hold that at the time of the Prophet and his companions, the obligatory prayers were performed with full concentration and in complete remembrance of God, and thus constituted the true *dhikr*. The practices of succeeding generations were but a pale reflection of this earlier practice. In

a bid to reproduce that earlier spirituality and devotion, the Sufis attached great importance to the practice of *dhikr*, to the extent that it was given even more importance than the canonical prayers. They turned *dhikr* into an effective tool for honing the excellence of their worship, of making their *ihsan* better, and enabling them to see God face to face. Thus *dhikr* found itself at the centre of Sufi practice. It is embarked upon and perfected under the guidance of a spiritual master and is performed both in gatherings and in the privacy of a spiritual retreat (*khalwah*).

In most orders, formal *dhikr* sessions or *majalis* (sing. *majlis*) are held at regular intervals. Under the guidance of the *shaykh* or his representative, the disciple, or *murid*, engages in *dhikr* for an hour or two. This may be done either silently or loudly, and might take the form of a chant; it might also be accompanied by certain gestures or be totally motionless, and might be further accompanied by music and dance. At times, it might be supported by the beat of a drum. *Khalwah* (solitary spiritual retreat) for the purpose of spiritual invocation, is engaged in from time to time. It might go on for as short a period as a couple of hours or it might even last for several days.

Besides the above-mentioned organized occasions, *dhikr* is to be done silently at all times of the day, even when one is engaged in other activities. A rosary, or *tasbih*, may be used to facilitate *dhikr*.

Another important practice akin to *dhikr* is the recitation of *wird*, a litany consisting of Qur'anic verses and prayers, the ninety-nine divine names and certain formulae put together by the leaders of the order. It differs slightly from one Sufi order to another but has certain common elements. Usually, the *salik* first asks for God's forgiveness, and then asks God to bless the Prophet. This is followed by the *shahadah*, the attestation of the divine Unity, and so on.

A shift in emphasis

The Qur'an mentions 99 names of God. There is however a tradition saying that God has as many as 90,000 names. Each name points to a particular attribute of God. All the names can be used while performing *dhikr*, for, as the Qur'an observes: 'You may call on God or you may call on the Merciful: by whatever name you call on Him, His are the most gracious names.' (17:11)

Early Muslims used to remember God even while going about their worldly chores. They believed that they would receive a reward for discharging their duties to their fellow men while keeping God in mind and acting in accordance with His will. The underlying idea was that anything done in the name of God and conforming to His commands amounted to remembering God or performing *dhikr*. It was in this broad sense that the companions of the Prophet understood the meaning of *dhikr*.

The Sufis, however, confined the concept of *dhikr* to a much narrower practice and gave it a more restricted meaning. In this way, they limited the broad scope of the Qur'anic understanding of *dhikr*. Then, starting from this narrow interpretation, they invented a number of new, specific ways of invoking the name of God—silently, loudly, accompanied by music, with or without dancing, etc., as mentioned in the last section. This shows how the teachings of Islam came under the influence of other, adjacent cultures. Converts from different religious backgrounds brought to it their own ways of thinking and their own traditions, which were gradually Islamized or given Islamic names, like the yogic practices which found acceptance among the Sufis.

The Prophet's companions and the Companions of the Companions regarded all forms of prayers other than compulsory prayers as *nawafil*

(sing. *nafl*), or works of supererogation. In early Islam this term was used in the general sense of doing 'good' in addition to the performance of one's obligatory duties and did not refer specifically to prayer. Islam enjoins a certain amount of minimum obligatory duties to be discharged by the believers and these are called *faraiz* (sing. *farz* – duty). Anyone who enters the fold of Islam has to discharge these minimal duties, but if he does more than that then, by his additional acts, he earns the double favour of God. This is known as *nafl* (extra). The Prophet himself used to perform supererogatory prayers, such as for example the midnight prayers. But both he and his companions interpreted *nafl* in a very general sense and understood it to mean *all* good actions (and not only prayer) performed over and above one's duties. So did the early ascetics. The later Sufis restricted the word *nafl* to the narrow sense of saying prayers over and above the obligatory prayers.

The Sufis did the same with 'remembrance of God' by limiting the meaning of the word *dhikr* to mean only the act of repeating the names of God and not every act, which, by its righteousness and adherence to God's commands, came earlier under the rubric of the remembrance of God. This change took place imperceptibly and soon these new notions came to be accepted as the norm by the general public.

Giving undue importance to mere recitation and chanting of the words of the Qur'an was not in accordance with the spirit of the Qur'an. True Islamic piety is not and has never been concomitant with the recitation of the Qur'anic verses in a milieu cut off from everyday activities, but is synonymous rather with the spirit of devotion and attachment to God while one is engaged in daily pursuits. If one had to be perpetually confined for worship in a *hujra* (a small, dark room), how was one to be tested on whether or not one had surrendered to God's will in day-to-day life?

The argument goes on as follows: God has made this world a testing ground. The divine test can be carried out only in interaction with others, when man has regular dealings with other men and acts with the thought of God in his mind. It is in the discharge of his worldly duties that he is tested as to whether or not he has really imbibed the true Islamic spirit. God has not told man to worship Him formally twenty-four hours a day. Therefore, if a man follows this path, the path of constant formal worship, it amounts to a willful shift in emphasis. According to the Qur'an, God desires man to remember Him continuously, but while taking part in all the lawful activities of the world. That is why the great importance given to the chanting of certain words and phrases for long hours at a time, as advocated by the Sufis, amounts to a shift in emphasis. In the Indian context, the Sufis definitely came under the influence of the spiritual exercises of the yogis and the practices of the *bhagats*. Hinduism believed that words had special effect and that, by chanting them a certain number of times, even gods could be controlled and their favours received. This practice is attested to in the present day in the singing of *bhajans* by the Hindus and *kirtan* by the Sikhs.

The early Sufis, first and foremost, laid stress on the renunciation of worldly pleasures. They also emphasized the fear of God and Judgement Day, and the need to centre one's thoughts on the fact that on the Day of Judgement one would be judged according to his good and bad deeds. Thus there are the famous early Sufis like Abu Darda (a companion of the Prophet), Hasan al-Basri (642-728) and others, who used to remember God most of the time, pray to Him and cry to seek His pardon. When asked why they did so, they would reply that even if they had not made any intentional mistake that required repentance, they might have made an unintentional mistake. For this they sought God's forgiveness by resorting to *nafl* prayer,

remembering God, reciting the verses of the Qur'an and living in fear of Him.

The most characteristic aspect of the life of the early Sufis was their desire for non-involvement in the matters of the world. This was the point of departure from the spirituality of the Companions of the Prophet, for we find that the Prophet and his companions, as well as their companions, performed all their worldly duties and, in doing so, they remembered God. They believed that if they continued to remember God in the midst of performing all the necessary mundane activities, their reward would be doubled – they would receive one reward for discharging the obligatory duties and another for remembering God at times other than those of formal worship.

The early Sufis were known for their asceticism. Poverty was their ideal. They thought that it was the world that distracted their attention from God. So, if they desisted from accumulating worldly things, they would be spared distraction, be able to achieve a high level of concentration and, as a result, their prayers would attain an exceptional quality.

The Early Development

The Early Sufis

To begin with, Renunciation of the world and an intense fear of God — the main features of the religious credo and practice of early Sufism— made its adherents stand out in society at large. But it was only much later that this form of Sufism acquired a full-fledged philosophical doctrine, with its characteristic ‘un-Islamic’ elements, such as the concept of pantheism and the Unity of Being (*wahdat al wujud*).

The early Sufis were ascetics in the true sense of the word and poverty was their ideal. They believed that worldly possessions and worldly concerns distracted one from a dedicated religious life. They were convinced that the desired concentration was possible only when one was not weighed down by material belongings. Some carried this a step further, advocating the renunciation not only of worldly desires, but of desire itself. Only then could one truly devote oneself to earning divine pleasure. They reasoned that when complete dedication and devotion were required to achieve worldly success in this life on earth, then success in the next, eternal life, without similar or even greater devotion and dedication, was impossible.

Ibn Khaldun has aptly summed up the way of life of the early Sufis: ‘The way of the Sufis was regarded by the early Muslims as the way of Truth and salvation. They zealously guarded piety, gave up all objects of worldly attraction for God’s sake, renounced pleasure, wealth and power, abandoned society and led a secluded life devoted to the service of God. These were

the fundamental principles of Sufism that prevailed among the companions and Muslims of the early times.’¹

Thus we find that the first phase of Sufism was a form of asceticism, the outcome of certain early believers’ personal interpretation of the Islamic concept of God and what this entailed.

There are a number of traditions narrating how the companions of the Prophet and the companions’ companions lived in awe and fear of God. Hasan al-Basri (642-728), the most famous Sufi of the first phase, had once told his disciples: ‘I have seen people among the Prophet’s companions to whom the world meant less than the dust under their feet’. He met a large number of the companions of the Prophet, including seventy senior companions and he reports that they wore simple, homespun garments made of camel hair, and were so preoccupied with righteous living that they seemed lost to the world. “Were they to see the best among you, they would think: ‘These people do not believe in the Day of Judgement,’” says Hasan al-Basri, testifying to the fact that theirs was the deep consciousness of the sin of disobedience and an extreme dread of divine punishment. They often passed the whole night in vigil, repeating the verses of the Qur’an. (45:20)

Abu Bakr, the first caliph, seeing a bird sitting on a tree, exclaimed: ‘Oh bird, how fortunate you are. If only I could be like you sitting on trees, eating their fruit and then flying away. No reckoning or doom awaits you. By God, I would like to be a tree by the wayside, and have a passing camel take me in its mouth, chew me, swallow me and then dispose of me as dung.’ (*Al-Baihaqi, Al Sunan Al-Kubra*)

¹ Muqaddima (Beyrut, 1900) P 467

Abu Darda, a senior companion of the Prophet, is reported to have said: 'If you knew what you shall see after death, you would not eat food or drink water with any relish; as for myself, I wish that I were a plant which is cut down and then devoured.'

When Abu Darda was told that Abu Saad ibn Munabbih freed a hundred slaves, he commented: 'Certainly, this is a great act. But let me tell you of one that is even greater: faith, which encompasses night and day, and, on one's tongue, the constant remembrance of God.' (*Hilyat al-Auliya*)

After Abu Darda died, someone asked his wife what was the nature of his worship. She replied: "He used to spend the whole day and night engrossed in contemplation." (*Hilyat al-Auliya*).

Rabia Basri (d. 801) once observed, 'the love of God has so absorbed me that neither love nor hate of any other thing remains in my heart.'

There is a hadith reported by Abu Darda: 'The Prophet once asked his companions: "Should I not tell you of the action that is best and most pure in the presence of your Lord; the action which will raise you up in the sight of God, and is better for you than great expenditure of gold and silver (in charity)?" "Do tell us," the companions replied. "It is the remembrance of God," said the Prophet.' (*Al-Tirmidhi, Shamail*)

The age of the Rightly Guided Caliphs (632-661) gave way to the oppressive rule of the Umayyads (661-750) who deviated from the path followed by their predecessors. They preferred a life of luxury as opposed to the life of extreme simplicity of the Rightly Guided Caliphs. The *shariah* began to be bypassed at will and twisted to suit their aims. They openly favoured their kinsmen and supporters, and discriminated against those who did not subscribe to their willful practices. They put undue pressure on the

governors and the judges (*qadi*), and through them implemented repressive measures against those who opposed them. For these reasons many pious Muslims regard this era as a betrayal and subversion of the true prophetic model.

Since people felt themselves helpless to counter this oppressive rule, they turned inwards, withdrawing altogether from the world. In this way, a change in political and social circumstances spurred the piously inclined to opt for a life of asceticism and led to the development of Sufism.

Hasan al-Basri

Hasan al-Basri (642-728) is the most prominent figure of the early ascetic movement, which stressed other-worldliness, piety and fear of God. He was born in Madinah and settled in Basra. In all probability, he is too young to have been the disciple of Ali bin abi Talib (d.661), yet the Sufi orders trace their spiritual descent through him to the Prophet Muhammad and Hazrat Ali. Some Sufi traditions have it that Hasan became Ali's disciple because of some indescribable spiritual experience.

Hasan al Basri was an outstanding scholar of his time and the author of a *tafsir*, which, unfortunately, did not survive. Only some fragments of his sermons and *risalas*, or epistles to the Umayyad Caliphs, 'Abdu'l Malik (685-705) and 'Umar II (Umar bin Abdul Aziz) (717-720) remain. He expressed disapproval of the malfeasance of the Umayyads, but was not in favour of a revolt against ostensibly lawful authorities. In a letter to 'Umar II, he writes: 'Beware of this world, for it is like a snake, for its hopes are lies, its expectations false.'²

² A.J.Arberry, Sufism, pp .33-34

Personally, he kept himself apart from the world and is known to have observed: "This world is a bridge which you cross but upon which you should not build." As his learning was proverbial, a large number of students used to come to seek knowledge from him.

It is said that at times the fear of God would seize him so powerfully, that it seemed to him as though hellfire was created for him alone. The story goes that one day a friend saw him weeping, and asked him the reason for his sorrow. He replied that he was weeping for fear that he might have unintentionally done something wrong or committed some mistake or spoken some word which was so displeasing to God that He might respond by saying: 'Begone, for you are no longer in My favour.'

Rabi'a al Adawiyya Basri

Rabi'a Basri (713-801) was a younger contemporary of Hasan Basri. Both of them knew each other well. She was born in Basra and spent her whole life there. She belonged to a poor family and during a famine she was sold into slavery. She used to worship God whenever she could. Finally, her master, impressed by her piety and her perseverance, set her free. From then on, she devoted all her time to God.

Rabi'a believed true piety was grounded in *tawakkul*, or trusting acceptance of God's will, and total dependence on Him. From this she developed the concept of Divine Love and the idea of possible intimacy with God. She used prayer as a medium of free and intimate communication with God. To her, this was not just a means of avoiding hell and of entering paradise, but a means of gaining access to God's Presence. Her prayers were a spontaneous outpouring of the heart and often had a mystical touch to them. Her mystical sayings were so influential that they took on the form of proverbs.

Rabia lived a life of extreme poverty. When once someone tried to help her, she responded: 'I would be ashamed to ask for worldly things from Him to whom the world belongs; how then could I ask for them from those to whom it does not belong?'

She held that God should be loved and worshipped without any selfish end in mind. She criticized those who worshipped God to secure His favours. She went so far as to say: 'I want to light a fire in Paradise and pour water in Hell so that people no longer worship God for hope of Paradise or for fear of Hell.' She prayed: 'O my Lord, if I worship You from fear of Hell, burn me in Hell, and if I worship You out of hope of Paradise, exclude me from it, but if I worship You for Your own sake, then do not withhold from me Your eternal beauty.'

It is narrated that once when somebody asked for Rabi'a's hand in marriage, she replied: 'He alone is entitled to marry who owns himself and has an existence of his own. But I am neither the master of my body nor of my life. They are the properties of my Lord. Ask Him for my hand in marriage.'³

Ibrahim ibn Adham

Ibrahim ibn Adham (d. 782) was born in a princely family of Balkh. One day he went out on a hunting expedition and followed an antelope so far into the forest that he lost his way. While in the wilderness, he heard a strange voice crying: "Awake! Were you created for this?" He was so moved by these words that he began to engage in heart-felt retrospect. Finally, he came to the conclusion that his way of life was not in accordance with the will of God and, therefore, resolved to change his ways. After spending a

³ Fariduddin Attar, *Tadhkirat ul-Auliya*, tr. Bankey Behari, Lahore 1962, p.. 26

whole night in meditation, he repented and asked God to forgive him for having led a neglectful life. The next morning he was a transformed man. He renounced all his possessions and became a disciple of Abdul Wahid bin Zayed, who was a disciple of Hasan Basri.

Ibrahim b. Adham attached the greatest importance to a complete renunciation of the world. He believed that true asceticism could not be achieved without living in a state of poverty and celibacy. A dervish told Ibrahim one day, 'One who takes a wife sails away in a boat, leaving the safe, solid earth (not knowing where the troubled waters of the seas of the world may toss him) and when a child is born, the boat sinks.'⁴

This is how Ibrahim explained the Sufi devotion to God:

'Once I purchased a slave. I asked him his name. He replied: "It is that by which you please to call me." I asked him what he would like to eat. He replied, "That which you would give me." I asked him what garments he would put on. He replied, "The ones that you would bestow on me.' I asked him what work he would perform. He replied, "That which you will ask me to do." I asked him, "What is your desire?" He replied, "I am but a slave, how can I have a separate will of my own?" I thought to myself, "Would that I were a slave of the Lord and could surrender totally to Him like this slave!"'⁵

And this is how he prayed to God:

"O God, you know that in my eyes Paradise weighs no more than the wing of a gnat compared with that honour which you have shown me in giving me Your love, or that familiarity which You have given to me by the

⁴ Fariduddin Attar, *Tadhkirat ul-Auliya*, tr. Bankey Behari, Lahore, 1961, p. 42

⁵ as above, p. 45

remembrance of Your name, or that freedom from all else which You have vouchsafed to me, when I meditate on the greatness of Your glory.”

He held that a true Sufi is one who covets nothing of this world, nothing of the next, and devotes himself entirely to God.⁶ He once said of himself that he had left the world to the seekers of the world and the hereafter to the seekers of the hereafter. For himself, he had chosen the remembrance of God in this world and the beautiful vision of the next.”

The practice of the early Sufis

By the time of Hasan Basri, Rabia Basri and Ibrahim ibn Adham (8th and 9th century AD) asceticism had become the dominant feature of a movement, which later came to be called Sufism. The Sufis wanted to withdraw from the world and devote all their time to worshipping God. They were convinced that, in order to focus their attention on this spiritual path, it was essential for them to isolate themselves from the world. This was possible only by limiting their necessities to the bare minimum. All the time they had at their disposal was to be spent in performing supererogatory prayers, fasting, etc. They took extra care to spend their day in the sincere remembrance of God. In this they departed very little from the path of earning God’s pleasure as shown by the Qu’ran and Hadith.

The point of departure between a Sufi-believer and a non-Sufi believer was that the Sufi believed in retiring from the world and spending his time in the worship of God, while the stand of the non-Sufi believer was that, after performing obligatory forms of worship, he must engage himself in other social duties as well. If these worldly duties were performed in

⁶ Hujwiri, *Kashaf al Mahjub*, tr. R.N.Nicholson, p. 217

accordance with the will of God, God would reward him for this, just as He rewarded him for his formal worship.

The early Sufis believed that the fewer the worldly possessions, the more they would be able to devote themselves selflessly to the worship of God. Thus, having fewer goods was taken as a guarantee for securing an entry into paradise. That is the reason why the Sufis held poverty in such high esteem.

Then came the stage when it was no longer believed that just possessing no wealth was enough. Rather, it was thought that one's heart should be free from even the desire to possess anything. Thus, the heart as well as the hand must be empty to attain the sought-after goal. This absence of desire signified a complete detachment from all things finite, and was regarded as 'true poverty' from the Sufi point of view. This concept was expressed by a later Sufi saint, Nizamuddin Auliya (d.1325) in these words:

“Rejection of the world does not mean that one should strip oneself of one's clothes and sit idle. Rejection of the world means that one may put on clothes and take food. But one should not set one's heart on anything. This and this alone is rejection of the world.”

However, one should not lose sight of the fact that the early Sufis were all practicing Muslims, in that they observed all the obligatory forms of worship. One may call them orthodox Muslims as far as their beliefs and practices were concerned, but in actual fact, they laid such great significance on certain points in the teachings of the Qur'an and traditions that it almost amounted to a shift of emphasis. Gradually, supererogatory forms of worship, or *nawafil*, came to have more importance attached to them than the obligatory forms of worship.

At this stage of the historical development of Sufism, the Sufis were concerned only with matters bearing upon practical theology. Metaphysical and theosophical speculations had not yet been introduced.

Towards Mysticism

Historical background

The time of the Prophet and his companions as well as that of the Rightly Guided Caliphs was a period when belief in God and the simple practice of this belief was considered enough for a life to be judged pious. There was a moderation to formal worship and to worldly activities. But the rise of the Umayyads, with their aspiration to worldly riches and power, estranged some of the single-minded believers who thought that the early prophetic ideals were being betrayed and abandoned. This gave rise to the early wave of asceticism and the emergence of figures like Hasan Basri, Rabia Basri and Ibrahim ibn Adham. Their piety was very personal, their interests other-worldly and their message simple – one should devote one's life to God's service in order to win His favour and please Him.

However, the concept of overwhelming divine love originally developed by Rabi'a, and solitary striving in order to reach His Presence, as exemplified by Ibrahim ibn Adham, began slowly and imperceptibly to acquire mystical overtones. By the time the Umayyads were replaced by the Abbasids in 750 AD, Sufism was deeply embedded in mystical practices. These practices aimed at personal visions of God, but, though achieved only through His grace, they nonetheless required a certain detachment from the world. This could be best achieved by following the spiritual path of the Sufis and by taking guidance from the Sufi masters. Beginning with mystical utterances simply declaring love of God, there was the gradual evolution of a proper and full-

fledged Sufi ideology, with detailed enumeration of the ‘stations’ of the ‘way’, the ‘states’ encountered thereof, the conditions of attaining the stations and the states, descriptions of particular endeavours of the great Sufis, and so on. This trend starts modestly with the views of al Muhasibi and Dhu’l Nun Misri, and flourishes in the writings of the Sufi saints of the succeeding generations, such as Bayazid Bistami and Junayd. In the utterances of al Hallaj one has an inkling of what Sufi ecstasy is capable of bringing about, while the spiritual experiences of Al Ghazali show how Sufism finally gained a theoretical backbone.

The 10th and 11th centuries were witness to yet another type of Sufi writings, which are usually described as ‘the Sufi manuals.’ These include the works of Sarraj, Kalabadhi, Qushairi and al Hujwari and give details of the practices of the Sufis and hagiographies of the saints. They are later on complemented with poetical works, mostly in Persian, which again describe the Sufi ways, the Sufi practices and the Sufi philosophy. These are the works of Sanai, Attar and Rumi. They employ a very vivid and distinctive imagery, which is studied under the rubric of Sufi imagery and expresses the Sufi realities through the prism of poetry.

Harith bin Asad al Muhasibi

Al Muhasibi (781-857) was born in Basra, but spent most of his life in the recently built Abbasid capital Baghdad. He studied traditions (*hadith*) and was closely involved with the scholars of his time. His interest in mysticism displeased the orthodox and the study of his writings was banned. He had to flee Baghdad. After that he lived in such secrecy that, when he died, only four men were present at his funeral.

The name Al Muhasibi was aptly given to him because of his habit of continuous self-examination. He believed one should approach God in humility, with a feeling of shame for one's shortcomings and repentance for the ingratitude and selfishness present in every human soul.

Al Muhasibi was the first Sufi who tried to reconcile the law (*shariah*) with the Sufi path (*tariqa*) and what he wrote had a profound influence on the later Sufis. Al Ghazali greatly admired his writings and one of his most illustrious pupils was al Junayd. Together with al Junayd, al Muhasibi is considered to be the founder of the sober or *sahw* school of Sufism.

Dhu'l Nun Misri

Abu'l Faiz Sauban ibn Ibrahim al Misri better known as Dhu'l Nun Misri (796-861) was a contemporary of al-Muhasibi. He was of Numidian descent and born in Upper Egypt. In all probability he studied medicine and alchemy and may have been influenced by Greek thought. He left Egypt and traveled widely in Arabia and Syria. During his travels he met Fatima of Nishapur (d.838), a famous woman Sufi of Khorasan, whom he called his 'lady teacher' (*ustadhi*) and from whom he sought spiritual advice. In 829 he was arrested for heresy and imprisoned in Baghdad. After his release, he returned to Cairo and it was there that he died.

Dhu'l Nun is reputed to be one of the first to discuss the spiritual states or *ahwal* (sing. *hal*) and stations or *maqamat* (sing. *maqam*). He considered the self to be the chief obstacle to all spiritual progress and was all for solitary quest. He was the first to describe the real nature of gnosis (*ma'rifa*): '...knowledge of the attributes of the Unity, and this belongs to the saints, those who contemplate the Face of God within their hearts, so that God reveals Himself to them in a way in which He is not revealed to any others in

the world. “The Gnostics are not themselves, but in so far as they exist at all they exist in God.”¹

Bayazid al Bistami

Abu Yazid al Bistami (d. 875), known also as Bayazid Bistami, was a grandson of a convert from the Zoroastrian faith and a native of Bistam in north Persia where he was born.

He was a master of the station of love (*mahabbah*) and a founder of the *Malamatiya*, or ‘path of blame.’ He was known for his ecstatic utterances (*shatahat*). Some of his sayings, which were spoken while in a state of ecstasy, were considered to be blasphemous by the religious authorities (*ulama*). He was an ascetic for over thirty years, but it is said that later he abandoned this discipline, saying: ‘Those who are most veiled from God are three: First is the ascetic who is veiled by his asceticism, second is the worshipper who is veiled by his devotion, and third is the scholar who is veiled by his knowledge.’²

When Bayazid was asked: ‘What did you find to be the greatest obstacle in the pursuit of the path?’ he replied: ‘Without His grace it is difficult to turn the heart to Him, and with His grace it runs effortlessly on the path.’³

Bayazid once said: ‘For thirty years I sought God. But, when I looked carefully, I found that in reality God was the seeker and I the sought.’⁴

¹ quotation from Rizvi, S.A.A., A History of Sufism in India, Vol. I, Delhi, 1978, p.47 (the source of the quotation not given)

² as Salami, Abu ‘Abd al Rahman, Kitab Tabaqat as sufiyya, Leiden, 1960, pp. 67-74

³ Fariduddin Attar, Tadhkirat ul-Auliya, Lahore, 1961, tr. Bankey Behari, p. .63

⁴ as above, p. 63

Junayd Baghdadi

Abu'l Qasim al Junayd (d.910) who was born in Persia, was the son of a glass merchant. He moved in the Sufi circles of Baghdad where he became a disciple of al Muhasibi and he studied law according to the Shafi'i school of jurisprudence. He eventually became the chief judge in Baghdad at a time when the orthodox religious authorities were increasingly hostile towards the Sufis, especially the 'intoxicated' ones linked with the name of Bayazid Bistami. Junayd, on the other hand, is described as the chief exponent of the 'sober' school of Sufism of which, together with al Muhasibi, he is considered the founder.

Junayd held the view that mystic knowledge of the Sufis should not be passed on to the uninitiated. This is how he described his own practice: 'For ten years I had to protect my heart from straying away and kept a watch on it. Thereafter, for the next ten years, my heart took care of me. Now my condition is such that the heart does not know me and I do not mind me. For the last twenty years the Lord is speaking through me. I am not in between, although the world is not acquainted with this. I have been narrating only formal Sufism for the last twenty years. I have been warned against uttering the mysteries in public. I lose my senses when the fear of God overpowers me, but recover when I am reminded of His mercy.'⁵

One of his disciples was al Hallaj, one of the most ecstatic of the Sufis, who utterly disregarded Junayd's advice to exercise patience and moderation. Consequently, Junayd predicted that Hallaj would die on the gibbet and, in his turn, Hallaj retorted that on that day Junayd would be wearing the robe of a scholar. Some years later Hallaj was indeed charged with blasphemy and

⁵ as above, p. 103

condemned to death. Junayd was wearing his Sufi robe on that day and refused to sign the verdict. When pressed by the caliph, he took off his Sufi robe, put on the gown and turban of the judge and signed the warrant of death writing: ‘According to the outer law, he is guilty. As for the inner reality, God alone knows.’⁶

Al Hallaj

Husayn ibn Mansur al Hallaj (858-922) was born in the Persian province of Fars and was the son of a wool-carder (in Arabic, *hallaj*). He left his homeland at the age of sixteen and traveled widely, spending time in Tustar, Baghdad, Basra, Khorasan, Transoxiana and India. He made three pilgrimages to Makkah. He was a follower of a number of prominent Sufis, including Junayd. He was a passionate exponent of the divine love and sought union with God, Whom he called the Beloved. His ecstatic utterances, his condemnation on the charges of heresy and subsequent execution made him one of the most controversial figures of classical Sufism.

His ignoble end was brought about by his proclamation: ‘Ana’l Haq’ – ‘I am the Truth,’ in which he implied that he was one with God. As he preached his views openly in the streets and bazaars of Baghdad, he earned the hostility of the administration and the orthodox. He was accused of blasphemy and of inciting the masses with his heresies. Even other Sufis of the time, including the most prominent of them, Junayd (who was also a jurist and an acting judge), considered such utterances to be over-extravagant and not really meant to be disseminated amongst the uninitiated. He was ultimately sentenced to death, his erstwhile spiritual master, Junayd, also signing the

⁶ as above, pp. 134-135

death warrant. He was hung from a gibbet and his ashes strewn over the Tigris.⁷

Al Ghazali

Abu Hamid Muhammad al Ghazali (1058-1111) was born in Tus, a town in the northeastern Persian province of Khorasan. He studied theology (*kalam*) under the greatest theologian of the age, al Juwayni, Imam al Haramayn, and went on to be appointed by Nizam ul Mulk, the Seljuk vizier, to teach the subject in the Nizamiya Madrasa of Baghdad. After teaching for four years, he experienced an acute spiritual crisis and in 1095 resigned from his teaching post. For the next twelve years he led the life of a wandering ascetic, turned to Sufism and finally became a Sufi. In the end he returned to his hometown, Tus, where he occupied himself with teaching up till the time of his death.

Al Ghazali wrote a number of works of which the most important are: *Deliverance from Error (al Munqidh min ad Dalal)*, which speaks of different classes of ‘seekers of knowledge’ and their practices, but is actually an account of his personal journey towards spiritual awakening; *The Beginning of Guidance (Bidayat al Hidayah)*, which explains what true guidance is - ‘a provision for the life to come’⁸; *The Incoherence of the Philosophers (Tahafut al Falasifa)*, a critique of philosophy; and his greatest work, *Revival of the Religious Sciences (Ihya’ Ulum al Din)*.

Al Ghazali’s turn to Sufism came about following a critical spiritual dilemma and after many years of traditional studies, which had somehow failed to give him personal satisfaction. He discovered this satisfaction in

⁷ Fariduddin Attar, *The Conference of Birds*.

⁸ al Ghazali, *Bidayat al Hidayah and al Munqidh min ad-Dalal*, tr. Watt, W.M. , ‘*The Faith and Practice of Al-Ghazali*’, revised edition, 1994, p. 97.

abandoning what he calls the ‘conditioned belief’ of his orthodox world view and turning to an alternative way of approaching God – this time not through scrupulous argument and adherence to minute rules, but by reaching out to God with his soul. His ascent to spiritual knowledge is well documented in his writings. Because he was basically a theologian and an expert on philosophy, which he studied so as to refute it better, his works are meticulously argued and lucidly present his views. For this very reason, his words carried a lot of weight with the scholars and his writings gave a stamp of approval to Sufism, carving out a place for it in the heart of Islam.

Shift to Mysticism

Trimingham says: ‘Mysticism is a particular method of approach to Reality (*haqiqa*), making use of intuitive and emotional spiritual faculties which are generally dormant and latent, unless called into play through training under guidance. This training, thought of as “traveling the Path”, aims at dispersing the veils which hide the self from the Real and thereby become transformed or absorbed into Unity.’⁹

Early Sufism was an expression of personal devotion and an assertion of a person’s right to pursue a life of contemplation, seeking thus to come close to God. The Qur’anic understanding of *dhikr* and prayer were modified to contain new meanings; new forms of piety and worship, tinted by personal devotion subsequently open to mystic interpretations, were born. This change of emphasis led to a shift from personal piety to mysticism. A special relation with God, like the one established by the mystics, seemed very attractive, both to those initiated into the Sufi ways as well as the general onlookers.

According to the Sufis, the shift to mysticism was actually not a shift to

⁹ Tirmingham, J.S., *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, 1971, p. 1

something new but merely a re-opening of the way already opened up for the chosen few by the Prophet and a further elucidation of this way. The actual experience of the Presence of God by a Sufi seemed to lie at the basis of this shift. Considering the impossibility of understanding an experience available only to a select few, as well as the equally impossible task of expressing verbally something so exceedingly rare, it is best to turn to the actual descriptions left by the Sufis.

Bayazid described his spiritual attainment thus: ‘When the Lord released and separated me from all creation and endowed me with His effulgence, and made me aware of His secrets, then I saw the Lord with my own eyes (of faith). And when I compared His effulgence with mine, the latter looked like a dark spot, and before His glory and majesty I looked puny and of no worth. Before His purity I was impure.

‘I learnt that it is only when He confers strength that we can carry on our spiritual practices, so the real Doer of all acts is God.

‘When the Lord annihilated my ego, and enlivened me with His eternity and revealed His unveiled Self to me, I saw the Lord through His instrumentality, and at that moment I turned mute, devoid of the sense of hearing and was totally illiterate. The curtain of ego being removed, I stayed in that state for long without the help of any organs of sense. Then the Lord bestowed on me divine eyes and divine ears and I found everything was in Him.

‘Then, at His instance, I asked from Him and prayed to Him that He might keep me near Him and away from the persons and things of the world, and from everything non-God and alien from Him. Thereupon He conferred His grace and I entered the Palace of Divine Unity (*tauhid*) where I was told that thenceforth my will shall be His.

‘I have now entered a life that knows no death and my existence is eternal.

‘Then the Divine Voice told me that the creatures wanted to see me. I replied, “I want to see none besides You, but if it be Your will that the world should see me, I submit to Your command. I pray to be endowed with Your Unity-consciousness (*wahada-niyat*) so that the creatures seeing me should rivet their attention on Your creation and on You, and so that I should not come between You and Your creation.” The Creator fulfilled my wish and since then in that state creation appears before me.

‘Then I took a step out of the threshold of the Lord but staggered and fell down. And I heard the Divine Voice say, ‘Bring back Our beloved friend to Us, because he cannot live without Us, nor move one step forward without Us.’”¹⁰

And this is Al Ghazali’s account of how having despaired of ever finding God through regular studies and having fallen prey to some undiagnosable sickness, he ultimately surrendered to God in the way the Sufis do: ‘Thereupon, perceiving my impotence and having altogether lost my power of choice, I sought refuge with God Most High as one who is driven to Him, because he is without further resources of his own. He answered me, He who “answers him who is driven (to Him by affliction) when he calls upon Him” (27:63). He made it easy for my heart to turn away from position and wealth, from children and friends.’¹¹ Al Ghazali describes his spiritual voyage as the mystical journey of the Sufis, and identifies his experience as akin to that of the Sufis.

¹⁰ Fariduddin Attar, *Tadhkirat ul-Auliya*, Lahore, 1961, pp.75-76

¹¹ Watt, W.M., *op. cit.*, pp. 60-61

Most orthodox scholars looked upon the claim of the Sufis of experiencing the Presence of God, directly and in this world, with great suspicion. Such an assertion seemed unacceptable, for it refuted the uniqueness of prophethood, and the divine communication received by the prophets. However, the Sufis claimed there were many ways of knowing God and theirs was merely one of them. They also maintained that not all can travel the Sufi path, and not all who attempt to do so can achieve their final goal – the vision of God is a gift that is given at His will, at any time and to anybody upon whom He chooses to bestow it. Al Ghazali, a theologian turned Sufi, confirmed this claim for them.

Early Sufi writings

The Sufis might trace their origin to the age of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions, but, as explained in the chapter ‘What is Sufism?’, the term Sufi, or *tasawwuf*, was not used in any writings before the 8th century AD. It appears neither in the Qur’an nor the *hadith*, nor does it figure in the dictionaries composed in the early days of Islam. The Sufis were obviously more concerned with their personal piety than the propagation of their views. This, however, changed in the 10th century AD, when the first works mentioning the Sufis made an appearance. Though a few might have been written by non-Sufis, the Sufis themselves authored most of these. Some were merely reports of the words and deeds of the famous saints, others tried to explain the phenomenon of Sufism on its own terms, while yet others were written to refute the attacks on the Sufis.

The most remarkable of these writings were works, which later came to be referred to as ‘the Sufi manuals.’ They explained the practices of the Sufis and offered advice for those aspiring to the Sufi path. Usually, the

manuals started with an attempt at defining the terms Sufi and *tasawwuf*, then moving on to the Sufi understanding of the Islamic tenets. After that they dealt in great detail with the relationship between *pir* and *murid*, specific Sufi concepts: state, stage, annihilation (*fana'*); and Sufi practices: *dhikr*, meditation, *sama'*, etc. All these were well illustrated with examples taken from the lives of the great Sufis.

The earliest surviving manual is a work by **Abu Nasr al Sarraj** of Tus (d. 988), which is called *Kitab al Luma'* ('The Book of Brilliances')¹². Written in 10th century Persia during the period when Sufism was being consolidated as a coherent body of spiritual teachings, this book gives a comprehensive picture of how the mystical path was in harmony with all aspects of Islamic religious law and doctrine. When speaking of understanding things the Sufi way, Sarraj insists upon a multi-leveled interpretation of divine revelation. This was in clear agreement with the Sufi belief that different people perceived the same things differently, and this perception corresponded to the different levels of understanding of the listeners. This notion of degrees of knowledge and nearness to God is one of the fundamental characteristics of the mystical teachings of Sufism. Thus the knowledge given by God to prophets and saints is indeed exceptional.¹³

Qut al Qulub ('The Nourishment of Hearts'), written by **Abu Talib al Makki** (d. 996), was an authoritative description of Sufism which attempted to reconcile it with orthodox Islam. It became one of the books most widely read by Sufis of all generations. In *Munqidh al Dalal*, Al Ghazali expressly mentions that he had studied this book. That it was a book used by the Sufis

¹² al Sarraj, *Kitab al Luma' fi'l tasawwuf*, ed. R.A.Nicholson, London, 1914 and 1963; for Urdu translation, see Sayyid Asrar Bukhari *Kitab al Luma'*, Lahore, 1984

¹³ some Sufi practices discussed by Sarraj are presented in the later chapter: 'Sufi Concept of Meditation'

of a much later period is attested to, for example, in *Maktubat-i-Sadi* (*The Hundred Letters*) by Sharafuddin bin Yahya Maneri (d.1381) who exhorted his disciples to read it.¹⁴

A treatise by **Abu Bakr al Kalabadhi** (d. 995), *Kitab al Ta'aruf li-madhhab ahl al tasawwuf* (*The Doctrine of the Sufis*)¹⁵ proved to be a very influential work, which was much quoted and commented upon by later writers. Suhrawardi Maqtul (d.1191) is reported to have said: 'But for the *Ta'aruf*, we should not have known of Sufism.'¹⁶ This statement seems to gain more urgency when one looks back on the history of Sufism and surveys the period when the book was actually written. There is no doubt that Sufism was passing through a grave crisis and no one was more aware of this than the Sufis themselves. In fact, it was on the point of being disallowed and declared a heresy, especially after the execution of Hallaj in 992. This was an event still fresh in the memory of the Sufis and might have taken place in the period when Kalabadhi was a child. Certainly, he himself never mentions Hallaj by name, but only as 'one of the great Sufis' while quoting his words, and only twice calls him Abu'l Mughith. There is no doubt that the author musters all his forces to prove that the true doctrine of the Sufis actually confirms the orthodox beliefs. His goal was similar to that of Al Ghazali who came much later and finally reconciled the scholastic and the mystic.

Al Kalabadhi's treatise is relatively short and can be naturally divided into five unequal parts: 1. general introduction to Sufism and discussion of the derivations of the term Sufi; 2. discussion of the tenets of Islam as accepted by the Sufis; 3. description of various 'stations' of the Sufis; 4. an exposition

¹⁴ see Sharafuddin bin Yahya Maneri, *The Hundred Letters*, tr. Jackson, P., 1980, pp. 111-113 (letter 28)

¹⁵ al Kalabadhi, *al Ta'aruf li-madhhab ahl al tasawwuf*, tr. by Arberry, A.J., as '*The Doctrine of the Sufis*', 1935, edition used: Delhi, 1994

¹⁶ see the introduction to the above by Arberry, p. x

on the technical terminology of Sufism; 5. depiction of the actual experiences of certain Sufis and material evidence of their communion with God.

Abu ‘Abd al Rahman al Sulami (d. 1021) of Nishapur is the author of the first collection of biographies of the Sufis, *Tabaqat al Sufiya* (*Classes of the Sufis*). Based on stories contained in this work, ‘Abdu’llah al Ansari al Harawi delivered lectures on the life and teachings of earlier Sufis and on the basis of Ansari’s lectures a new work in Persian emerged also called *Tabaqat al Sufiya*. Thus Sulami’s *Tabaqat* laid the foundations of a genre of biographical literature, which classified the Sufis of one generation, or three or four decades, under separate chapters, calling them *tafaqat*, or classes. He usually focuses on what best represents the particular person’s life and sayings. The work is concise and has only 105 entries. The data is compact, the *isnads* abridged, the style lucid and flowing. It is modeled on the biographical dictionaries of narrators or transmitters of the *hadith*, such as the *Kitab al Tabaqat al Kabir*.¹⁷

The leading work in this category is the *Hilyat-al Auliya* of **Abu Nu’aym al Isfahani** (d. 1038). It is an anthology of 689 biographies, starting with the Prophet and his wives and daughters. All men of piety, Sufi or not, are given attention. However, the narrative is uneven and lacks the symmetry of Sulami’s work. Some entries are very long, the longest being of 142 pages, while others extremely short.

Abu’l Qasim al Qushayri (d.1072) was a native of Iran who wrote in Arabic and his most famous work, *Al Risala*, is a very comprehensive summary of Sufism. Brief biographical sketches of the great Sufis are followed by detailed descriptions of the spiritual states and stages of the Sufi path. Like

¹⁷ Rizvi, S.A.A., A History of Sufism in India, Vol. I, Delhi, 1997, pp.62-63

other early Sufi authors, he insisted upon linking the practice of Sufism with the legal and ethical observances of Islam. But he was convinced that a Sufi master occupied a level much higher than any of the legal scholars, and maintained that spiritual advancement was generally impossible without a master. A master's duty was to instruct his disciples, taking into account their individual temperaments, intelligence and perseverance. At the same time, he stated again and again that the study of books and theoretical learning alone were not particularly useful for spiritual advancement. Instead, he recommended numerous practices that aimed at curbing the ego, as he considered that the first and last step in attaining God's presence.

Qushayri's *Al Risala* exerted great influence on the practice and philosophy of many generations of Sufis. Written in Arabic, it was translated into Persian during the author's lifetime.

The most famous and most widely read of them all was *Kashf al Mahjub*¹⁸ (*Revelation of the Veiled*) written by 'Ali ibn 'Uthman al Hujwari (d. 1074).

Hujwari was born in Ghazna and studied under many Sufi masters. What is known of his life comes mostly from autobiographical references in his own work. For many years he led an itinerant life but, in the end, settled in Lahore and it was there that he died. After his death he was revered as a saint and his tomb became a place of pilgrimage. He must have interceded for many of his followers, for he became known as Data Ganj Bakhsh or 'Distributor of Treasure'. Among the early mystics who visited his tomb was Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti, the founder of the Chishti order.

While all the above mentioned works were in Arabic, Hujwari's manual was written in Persian, making it one of the oldest Sufi works in that language.

¹⁸ The *Kashf al Mahjub* by Al Hujwari, ed. and tr. R.A. Nicholson, London, 1967

It was composed towards the end of his life and draws upon vast resources of material available in Arabic. It is considered to be the most authoritative exposition of Sufism according to the school of Junayd. He succeeded, like many other Sufis before and after him, in reconciling his theology with an advanced mysticism. He describes the central doctrine of annihilatin, or *fana'*, by comparing it to combustion by fire, which changes the nature of everything into its own nature, but without changing the essence of the thing burned. He also persistently warns his readers that no Sufi, not even one who attains the supreme degree of sanctity, is dispensed from obeying the religious law.

The works of **al Ghazali** (d. 1110) have already been mentioned earlier when his life and contribution to Sufism were described. His writings helped Sufism to find its place in the mainstream of Islam.

Shihabuddin Suhrawardi (1144-1234) was the author of '*Awarif al Ma'arif*¹⁹, a standard treatise on mysticism, which became the most closely studied text among the Sufis. There was a section on the origin of the word Sufi, which examined all possible derivations of the term. Further, all the relevant Sufi concepts like *tariqa*, *fana'*, *baqa'*, *nafs*, *hal* and *maqam* were critically expounded. This was followed by a discussion of specific Sufi practices: *dhikr*, *sama'*, *muraqaba*, etc. His expositions were a great improvement on what the earlier books offered. He also discussed the establishment of *khanqahs*, recognizing in them the positive points of the communal life they offered, although he considered them an innovation. As it was a widely read text, it acquired numerous commentaries which were then used along with the original. Among its numerous translations and

¹⁹The '*Awarifu'l Ma'arif* by Shaikh Shahab ud din 'Umar bin Muhammad Suhrawardi, tr. Clarke, H.W., 1891, reprinted Delhi, 1984

commentaries there is also one by a famous Chishti saint, Gesu Daraz (d. 1422), which points to the fact of its widespread use by the Sufis of the Indian subcontinent.

Sufi poetry

Starting with the 10th century, to be more precise the year 945, when the Buyahids took over the reins of the Abbasid Empire, the caliphs were reduced to the status of mere nominal rulers and the Islamic world remained in constant upheaval. What followed was a virtual disintegration of the empire into a number of independent provincial regimes. The emergence of local dynasties in Persian lands led to the flourishing of Persian as the language of academic discourse. Soon, at least in the central and eastern lands of Islam, Arabic became above all the language of prayer as well as religious and scientific writing, while literature turned to Persian.

The earlier works of the Sufis, including those mentioned above, that is 'the manuals' (with the exception of *'Awarif ul Ma'arif*, which was the first of the manuals in Persian) and the hagiographies of the saints were all in Arabic. But with the emergence of Persian as a vehicle of literary expression, the Sufis too turned to it with great enthusiasm. Thus, though 'it was the prose works of the 10th and 11th century Sufis which had the greatest effect in fashioning Sufism into an orthodox mould, ... the sensitivity and euphony of transcendental love, as it led to annihilation, found its greatest expression through poetry, particularly that written in Persia.'²⁰ To use a common expression, the Sufis of the period took to poetry as ducks take to water.

The first practitioner of mystical poetry is **Abu Sa'id Fazlu'llah bin Abi'l Khair** (d. 1049), a great Sufi and a great poet. He was a contemporary

²⁰ Rizvi, S.A.A., *A History of Sufism in India*, Vol. I, Delhi, 1978, p. 66

of Hujweri who mentions him frequently in his *Kashf al Mahjub*. He was born into a family with Sufi inclinations and his father, who was a druggist, spent much time in the company of the Sufis. One day, when still a boy, at the request of his mother, he was taken by his father to a house where a *sama'* was being held. The quatrain he heard there impressed him so much that he remembered it for life and was given to quoting it in his discourses.²¹

God gives the dervish love – and love is woe;

By dying near and dear to Him they grow.

The generous youth will freely yield his life,

The man of God cares naught for worldly show.²²

These lines were composed by Abu'l Qasim, and indeed he was the author of most of the quatrains found in Abu Sa'id's anthology. Though the anthology is known under Abu Sa'id's name, the authorship of the quatrains attributed to him is suspect. He often used to quote verses of different poets during his discourses and allowed them to be chanted at *sama'*, thus lending his name to them. The accounts of his life bear out the fact that he was a charismatic and extremely popular preacher with a large following. His piety and devotion were proverbial and his company was greatly valued. At the end of his life he settled in a *khanqah* in Mayhana and drew up the rules for its functioning. These rules were probably the first ever written on how to run a Sufi centre. Though he founded no order of his own, he prepared the ground for the future foundation of the Sufi orders which took shape in the 12th century.

²¹ for the life and works of Abu Sa'id, see Nicholson, R.A., *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, 1921 (reprinted 1967), which devotes a chapter to him.

²² p. 3 in the above

The early poetry of the Sufis was mostly confined to quatrains or *rubaiyat*. The four-line verses allowed for the expression of a single theme or idea, without the need to tell a story. Abu Sa'id's quatrains could be easily incorporated into a discourse and used to illustrate a point. While Abu Sa'id remains largely unknown among non-Persian speakers, the English translations of the quatrains of **Umar Khayyam** (d. 1124) made them one of the most famous collections of Persian verses in the world. Edward Fitzgerald's 19th century English translation, though not very faithful, does capture the sense and the imagery of the original.

However, during the 12th and 13th centuries Sufi poetry reached its pinnacle in the form of the narrative poem, or *masnavi*. The three greatest exponents of this style were Sana'i, 'Attar and Rumi, known simply as Maulana ('Our Master').

Abu'l Majd Majdud Sana'i (d. 1130) was a native of Ghazna. For a while he lived the life of a court poet, but finally retired from the world to become a dervish. His best-known work is called *Hadiqatu'l Haqiqa*, or 'The Garden of Truth' in which he presents the Sufi theories on God, the Prophet, gnosis, love of God, etc. through different anecdotes and allegories. Besides this *masnavi*, he also composed numerous other couplets or *ghazals*.

Fariduddin Attar (d. 1229) was born in Nishapur where he also died. Legend has it that he was killed during the Mongol invasion, which finally culminated in the capture of Baghdad in 1258. Attar was a prolific writer and is thought to have written 114 works. Numerous *ghazals* and *masnavis*, or narrative epics, bear his name. His compilation of the biographies of the Sufis, *Tadhkiratul ul-Auliya*²³, is one of the major sources of the lives of the

²³ English translation by Bankey Bihari, Lahore, 1961

Sufi masters, which include Hasan Basri, Rabi'a Basri, Bayazid, Junayd, Hallaj, and many others. Of his *masnavis*, the most famous is *Mantiq al Tair* or 'The Conference of Birds', but he also wrote others of which the better known are: *Ilahinamah*, or 'The Book of Divine Knowledge' and *Asrarnamah* or 'The Book of Mysteries.'

'The Conference of Birds', his masterpiece, is an allegory of the quest for and the union with God. The story is surprisingly simple. One day the birds wake up to the fact that theirs is the only kingdom that does not have a king. They get together and decide to go in search of one, but they need a leader to lead them in this endeavour. To this end they elect the hoopoe (*hudhud*) as their guide and he tells them that they already have a king, who is called Simurgh. The birds at first are very eager to go looking for him but, when they hear about the difficulties to be encountered on the way, they drop out one by one and finally only thirty birds reach the palace of the king. At first they are denied entry but when on persevering, eventually gain entry into the presence of Simurgh, they see their own selves reflected in the form that appears before them. The Simurgh is they and they are the Simurgh. The apparent duality and its end are further reinforced by the intended pun. The word Simurgh broken down into its components means simply **si**-thirty and **murgh**-bird, so Simurgh is The Thirty Birds. Thus, in masterly fashion, Attar presents The Way, with all its elements: the seeker (*talib*), the spiritual mentor (*murshid*), the impediments (self), the ultimate realization and the annihilation.

But the mystic trend already present in the poetry of Sana'i and developed further by Attar reaches its peak in the works of **Jalal ud din Rumi**. Rumi (1207-1273) was born in Balkh in Khurasan. His father, Bahaud din Walad, was a learned man and a Sufi. Because of the impending invasion of

the Mongols in 1219, Bahaud din fled with his family from Balkh. After several years of wandering, he finally settled in Konia in present-day Turkey, where he gave lectures on religious sciences and mystical knowledge. These were well attended. At the death of Bahaud din in 1231, Jalal ud din took over from his father. By then, he was already well versed in the religious sciences: Qur'anic commentary, hadith, *fiqh*, Arabic language and literature. He also studied mystical practices under a master, Burhan ud din Muhaqqiq al Tirmidhi (d. 1244) but they did not make much impression on him at that time.

It is said that one day Rumi was sitting among his books, surrounded by his disciples, when a passing dervish stopped by, looked around and asked: 'What are all these books about?' Rumi, judging him by his unkempt looks, dismissed him saying: 'You wouldn't know about that.' At this the books burst into flames. Rumi was heart-broken so the dervish restored the books to their former state. When asked by Rumi how he had done so, he was given the answer: 'You would not understand *that*.'²⁴

The dervish was none other than Shams ud din of Tabriz and the meeting changed Rumi's life. He identified himself so completely with Shams that the voluminous collection of his mystical couplets is called *Diwan-i Shams Tabriz*. A large number of ghazals bears the name Shams Tabriz as their *takhallus* and the dominant theme is the ecstatic love of God. In fact Rumi became so obsessed with Shams ud din that his disciples plotted against the dervish and he disappeared as suddenly as he had appeared. It is said that the disciples murdered him.

However it was not the numerous couplets or *ghazals* and quatrains or

²⁴ paraphrased after an account given by Khalifah Abdul Hakim, Jalal ad Din Rumi, in Sharif, M.M. ed.;

rubaiyat that brought Rumi immortal fame, but his *masnavi*, known in English as ‘The Masnavi of Inner Meaning’ (*Masnavi-i Ma’navi*).²⁵ It is divided into six books and contains about 26,600 couplets. It does not have a clear structure but reflects the spiritual experiences and the mystical flights of the mind in search of God. It is said that Rumi dictated the verses whenever he was in the grip of ecstasy – sometimes while sitting or walking, or even at times while dancing. Sometimes he would keep on dictating throughout the night. *Masnavi* is not one long story but a collection of stories from the Qur’an, hadith, past history, and the lives of the saints. The stories are interspersed with mystical commentaries and Sufi teachings, making it one of the greatest compendiums of mystical Sufi thought.

Fihi ma Fihi (“In it is what is in it”), translated by Arberry as ‘Discourses of Rumi’²⁶, is a collection of Rumi’s sermons and conversations as recorded by some of his disciples.

Rumi’s fame spread far and wide and he had many disciples. He did not establish an order himself but, immediately after his death, his religious movement developed into an organization. Ibn Batuta, who visited Konia in 1332, that is 50 years after Rumi’s death, refers to it as the Way of the Jalaliyya.²⁷ Later on it came to be known as the Mawlawiyya. Rumi was succeeded by Hasan Husam ud din, his closest disciple and follower and after him the succession passed on to Rumi’s son, Baha’ ud din Sultan Walad. It was under him that the development of the principles and organization of the order took place. The order rose to become one of the most influential in Anatolia and its members became famous for their devotion to music and the nature of their *dhikr* practices, for which they came to be known as ‘the whirling dervishes.’

A History of Muslim Philosophy, vol. II, Delhi, 1961, pp.823-24

²⁵ The Mathnawi of Jalal ud din Rumi, tr. Nicholson, R.A., London, 1926

²⁶ *Fihi ma fihi*, tr. by Arberry, A.J., as Discourses of Rumi, London, 1961

²⁷ The Travels of Ibn Batuta, tr. Gibb, H.A.R., first published 1929, reprinted 2002, Delhi, p.130

The Formative Period

Historical changes

If the twelfth century is held to be a turning point in the history of Sufism, it is because the new Sufi orders now took on their definitive shape through their chains of lineage, by which their originators could, with confidence, identify their spiritual links with their mentors in ascending order right back to the Prophet himself. With this knowledge, it was a simple matter for the disciples of these shaykhs — even when spatially and temporally far apart — to establish themselves as belonging to a single lineage. And thanks to their being able to trace their spiritual antecedents so far back, they now had an unassailable and permanent identity, thus guaranteeing an unbroken tradition, even with the spread of the shaykhs' *khalifas* to far-off places.

This latter evolutionary phase took place at a time when hordes of people from Central Asia were thronging into Islamic strongholds in an unremitting quest for new regions over which they could establish their suzerainty. Leaving their homelands around Samarqand and Bhukhara, they advanced rapidly on horseback and such was their strength and determination that it was only a matter of time before they took over the reins of the Abbasid Empire. Another swarm of migrants followed on their heels, having been forced by the Mongol invaders to abandon their homes. In an attempt to evade the Mongol threat, they finally found their way in large numbers on to the Gangetic plains, where they endeavoured to build new empires for themselves. The turning point came when in 1258 the Mongols sacked

Baghdad, thus leaving the world of Islam bereft of its greatest centre of learning. The scholars and mystics, who had to flee for their lives, spread out across various regions to less prominent capitals in order to establish new centres of patronage and learning.

The Establishment of the Main Sufi orders

By the 12th century, Sufism had become a popular movement with broad grass roots support. The aspirants to the Sufi way became quite numerous and developed the tendency to attach themselves to a particular master, staying in his *khanqah* and interacting in the communal life there. The most popular orders were based in the Persian provinces of Khurasan and Transoxiana. Many important founders of the orders in Baghdad were Persians who had been influenced by the Baghdadi schools of mysticism, while at the same time developing new frameworks of their own.

The two great orders that were founded in Baghdad in the period spanning the 12th and 13th centuries were the Qadriya and the Suhrawardiya. The Naqshbandiya order was set up in Transoxiana, while the Chishti order, which went on to become the most influential Sufi order in India, is associated with the area around Herat in today's Afghanistan. The Kubrawiya order came into existence in Khwarizm and metamorphosed into the Indian Firdausiya and Hamadaniya, with many more offshoots known under different names all over the Islamic world.

The spiritual founder of the Qadriya order was Shaikh 'Abdul Qadir Jilani (1077-1166), who was born in the village of Jilan, south of the Caspian Sea. Before coming to Baghdad, he spent 25 years of his life as a wandering dervish. Once in the capital of the Abbasids, he became a very successful theologian. He divided his life between that of a theologian and a *madrassa*

teacher on the one hand, and that of a Sufi and a master of a *khanqah* on the other. He spent most of his life in Baghdad and Jilan halfway between Baghdad and Wasit. After his death, his sons and disciples perpetuated his method of spiritual practices with the aim of cultivating the true Islamic spirituality. This came to be known as the Qadariya order. The order spread slowly all over the Islamic world, with centres in North Africa, Iraq, India and Indonesia.

The Suhrawardiya order traces its spiritual origin to Abu Najib Suhrawardi (1097-1168), the disciple of Ahmad Ghazali (d. 1126). Ahmad Ghazali was a brother of the famous Abu Hamid bin Muhammad al Ghazali (d. 1111) who, after leading the life of a theologian, turned to Sufism as a result of a spiritual crisis. Because of this he left his job at the Nizamiya madrasa in Baghdad in 1095, and his brother Ahmad Ghazali succeeded him to the post. Ahmad Ghazali was a Sufi mystic who belonged to the Junayd school of Sufism but, contrary to Junayd's tradition of *sahw* or sobriety, he was given to *sukr* or mystic intoxication. He had a large following of disciples, one of whom was the above-mentioned Abu Najib Suhrawardi.

However, the actual founder of the order was Shaykh Shihabuddin Abu Hafs Suhrawardi (1145-1235), who was a nephew of Abu'l Najib. Abu Hafs studied theology with Shaykh 'Abdu'l Qadir Jilani, but was initiated into Sufism by his uncle. He was closely associated with the Abbasid Caliph al Nasir (1179-1225) who built him an extensive *khanqah*. Of the many works written by him the most famous was '*Awarifu'l Ma'arif*', which was closely studied by Sufis of all orders.

Shaykh Kubra a famous sufi of this century was a very learned man who traveled all over the Islamic world studying religious sciences. Late in life, he settled in Khwarizm, where he built a *khanqah* for himself and his followers.

He died during the Mongol invasion of Khurasan and Jami gives an account of his death: “When the Tartar heathen reached Khwarizm, the Shaykh assembled his disciples...and said, ‘Arise quickly and depart to your countries...’ Some of the disciples said, ‘How would it be if you were to pray that perhaps this (catastrophe) might be averted from the lands of Islam...’ ‘Nay,’ replied the Shaykh, ‘this is a thing irrevocably predetermined which prayer cannot avert.’ Then his disciples besought him, saying, ‘If you also would join us and depart into Khurasan it would not be amiss.’ ‘Nay,’ replied the Shaykh, ‘here shall I die a martyr, for I am not permitted to go forth.’ So his disciples left for Khurasan. He said, ‘Arise in God’s name and let us fight in God’s cause.’ When he came face to face with the heathen, he continued to cast stones at them till he had no stones left. The heathen fired volleys of arrows at him, and an arrow pierced his breast.”¹

Shaykh Najmuddin Kubra is the spiritual founder of the Kubrawiya order, which spread to Baghdad, Khurasan and India. The two Indian branches were known as the Firdausiya and the Hamadaniya.

An important order named the Silsila-i-Khwajagan thrived in Transoxiana. It later spread into India in a reorganized form and went on to be known as the Naqshbandiya. It traced its spiritual origin to Khwaja Abu Yaqub Yusuf al Hamadani (d.1140), who was educated in Baghdad but lived most of his life in Marw and Herat, dying in Marw. One of his main disciples, Khwaja ‘Abdul Khaliq bin ‘Abdul Jamil came from Ghujduwan, a large village in the vicinity of Bhukhara and it was he who gave the order its distinct framework.

The 12th and 13th centuries could, therefore, be considered one of the most important periods in the history of Sufism. The Sufi saints, who lived

¹ A Literary History of Persia, Cambridge, 1964, vol II, pp. 492-93

in their *khanqah* praying, meditating and teaching new pupils, became an important feature of the practical facet of Islam. Soon the *khanqahs* became affiliated with one or the other order, and acquired a more precisely defined ritual and ideology. The documents of initiation (*ijaza or khilafat nama*) began to be used in establishing a chain of transmission, which made it easier to disseminate the teachings while preserving their distinct flavour. The political upheavals shifted the centres of power, leading to a massive movement of scholars and mystics, who followed the rulers and their armies in search of patronage and new opportunities. The Sufis definitely were at the forefront of any new venture, as is illustrated by the history of the Chishti order in India.

Sufism and Ibn al 'Arabi

Besides the organizational changes, which led to the formation of definite Sufi orders centred around a spiritual master, there was yet another important factor which gave a distinct shape to the discourse of Sufism. This was the philosophy of Ibn al 'Arabi, a great Sufi and philosopher, whose ideas forever changed the landscape of Sufi thought.

Ibn al 'Arabi (d. 1240) was born in Spain but spent more than half of his life in the Near East. He died in Damascus. He was a great mystic and was known as *al-shaykh al-akbar*. His teachings proved to be very influential and gave form to later Sufism. Among those who were influenced by his teachings were Jalauddin Rumi, although his commentators include Maulana Abdur Rahman Jami of Herat (1414-1492) and also Abdul Karim of Khwarizm (1365-1428). He is credited with developing the doctrine of *wahdat al wujud*. This concept came to play a great role in subsequent Sufism and was prevalent in India, where all the orders except the Naqshbandis (especially after Ahmad Sirhindi's [d. 1604] attack on the thought of Ibn 'Arabi followed it).

Ibn ‘Arabi was a very prolific writer and his main works are: *Futuhat al Makkiyah* (‘The Makkah Revelations’), *Fusus al-Hikam* (‘The Bezels of Wisdom’), *Risalat al-Khalwah* (‘A Treatise on Spiritual Retreat’). As far as mystical philosophy is concerned, out of all these, *Fusus al-Hikam* is probably his most important work. Once we approach Ibn ‘Arabi’s philosophical and mystical writings, we can see that there are certain ideas that play a central role. These are *wujud* or existence, God’s self-disclosure, or *tajalli* and imagination, or *khayal*. However, the most fundamental is the concept of the perfect human being, or *al-insan al-kamil*. This perfect man is the origin and the goal of the universe, as well as the guide on the path to God. All works of Ibn ‘Arabi especially *Futuhat al Makkiyah* and *Fusus al Hikam* centre on this idea of the perfect man.

At the same time, Ibn ‘Arabi’s teachings are tied to the Qur’an and try to show how the Qur’an manifests the reality of God in every chapter, verse, word and letter. The governing idea is the oneness of God, or *tawhid*. But while God is one through His essence (*dhat*), He is “many” through our different ways of knowing Him or His many ways of showing Himself to us. His oneness refers to *wujud*, and his “manyness” to the things that have no *wujud*. The unifying principles of the many things are known as the “divine names”. Thus Ibn ‘Arabi says that God is the One/Many (*al wahid al kathir*) – He is one through His essence and many through His names.

Ibn ‘Arabi never employed the term *wahdat al wujud*; it was used only by his followers, Said al Din Farghani (d.1296) being the first to use that term to describe the phenomenon of God being present in everything. In later Islamic history, especially in the debates over Ibn al ‘Arabi on the Indian subcontinent, the view of *wahdat al wujud* was said to stress that “All is He” (*hamah ust*), while the opposing view, expressed as *wahdat al shuhud*

by Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi (d.1604), was said to maintain that “All is from Him” (*hama az ust*).²

In *Futuh al Makkiya* we see that Ibn ‘Arabi’s approach is to deal with any verse of the Qur’an or *hadith* or any issue by adopting the two approaches: of the “oneness” and “manyness” of God. He often refers to these two ideas as *tanzih* and *tashbih*, God’s transcendence and immanence. The first (*tanzih*) he associates with the names of majesty (*jalal*) and wrath (*ghadab*), and the second with the names of beauty (*jamal*) and mercy (*rahma*). Further, Ibn ‘Arabi associates the first with rational thinking (*‘aql*) and the second with imagination (*khayal*) and direct vision (*kashf, shuhud, dhawk, futuh* – unveiling, witnessing, tasting, opening). In his view, these are the two basic standpoints of Islamic thought; the first associated with the philosophers, theologians and jurists and the other with the Sufis. Ibn ‘Arabi emphasizes the necessity for both types of knowledge – one being the knowledge of the philosophers, the theologians and the jurists, and the other being the knowledge of the Sufis. He says that these two ways of seeing reality are the “two eyes” (*‘aynan*).

Ibn ‘Arabi, while writing his works, drew from all the Islamic sciences, especially Qur’anic commentary, tradition, grammar, jurisprudence and theology. What makes him different from the masters of the above-mentioned sciences is his reliance on ‘unveiling’, or *kashf*, and ‘imagination’, or *khayal* as helping the reason, or *aql* to understand and see the reality. *Kashf* or unveiling, is a type of vision that sees the presence of *wujud al-haqq*, the Real Being, manifest in God’s signs. *Khayal*, too, helps us to see the oneness of reality.

To put it briefly, Ibn al-‘Arabi’s fundamental doctrines were the unity of all being (*wahdat al wujud*) and the idea of the perfect man (*insan al kamil*).

² Friedmann, Y., Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi, Delhi, 2000 (first published 1971), p.. 65

He tried to reconcile these doctrines with the doctrines of Islam. If he is accepted as the *shaykh al-akbar* of the Sufis, then Sufism requires seeing with both eyes (*'aynan*), the eye of traditional religiosity and the eye of spiritual practice. Looking at the world with one eye only would yield a distorted image of reality.

Ibn al-Arabi is considered the greatest Arabic speaking mystic that Islam ever produced. Having said that, his brand of Sufism is not accessible to everyone, and he acknowledges this point by calling himself the “seal of the Muhammadan friends of God”. For Ibn ‘Arabi, Sufism is the ultimate and the best way of reaching God. However, he was accused of being a pantheist who tried to reconcile his pantheistic doctrine with Islam.

The important thing to remember while studying sufism is the fact that the Sufi approach to God is considerably different from the approaches offered by the philosopher or the theologians. While the philosophers approach the idea of God in a rational manner, the theologians approach it in a discursive manner, trying to find formal arguments for the Quranic doctrine on God, Sufism turns to spiritual experience. It considers the experience of oneness with God, an inner feeling of *tawhid*, as its main objective.

There were some Sufis like Hasan al Basri whose thought was rational, although strongly influenced by deep piety; there were others like Al-Hallaj who formulated totally new ideas of oneness with God (eg Al-Hallaj’s statement, “I am the truth” avowing his oneness with God, the Truth); there were yet other Sufis who did not challenge the usual conclusions of Ash’arite like al Ghazali, a theologian turned Sufi, who stood firm on theological ground, while at the same time acknowledging the fact that

spiritual practices do provide a direct approach to God. Finally, there were many, especially from the 13-14th century onwards, who were influenced by an existential monism, similar to the mystical philosophy of Ibn 'Arabi. These Sufis saw God as being present in each and every one of His creations and were, in consequence, labelled pantheists by the orthodox.

Thus, the two main lines of Sufi thought were:

- a. *wahdat al shuhud*
- b. *wahdat al wujud*

Wahdat al Shuhud

This concept means the 'Oneness of Witness', Al-Hallaj being its principal exponent.

Union with God is achieved by God bearing witness to Himself and to His mystery of Unity, in the mystic's heart. The divine transcendence and its complete Oneness in relation to all creation is the central object of the act of faith. But the meeting with God is brought about by love. This love establishes a dialogue between the heart of a Sufi and God until both, that is the Sufi and God, become one.

It is well known that the official Islam of the 9th century opposed this union of love, this oneness of Witness (oneness of a Sufi and God) in the duality of natures.

The most eloquent exponent of the concept of *wahdat al shuhud* as opposed to *wahdat al wujud* was Ahmad Sirhindi (d.1623), a Naqshbandi Sufi of the Indian subcontinent. In order to understand his thought, one has to keep in mind the gulf created between Islam and Sufism by Ibn 'Arabi's theories of *wahdat al wujud*. Ibn 'Arabi saw God's manifestation in every single thing

present in the universe, thus advocating monism and pantheism. Sirhindi tried to understand Ibn 'Arabi's mysticism but finally came to the conclusion that 'the union with God is only experimental (spiritual) and not existential (real). God is not and cannot be one with everything'. Thus, Ahmad Sirhindi rejected the pantheism and *wahdat al wujud* (unity of Being) of Ibn 'Arabi in favour of *wahdat al shuhud* (unity of Witness).

Wahdat al Wujud

This concept of 'Oneness of Being' came to dominate Sufism after Ibn 'Arabi (13th century). Ibn Taimiya (13th century) saw in it the influence of philosophers, especially that of Ibn Sina (11th century) and condemned it. But one may say that these ideas were also present in the minor works of Al Ghazali (12th century).

The concept of *wahdat al wujud* is, in a way, a reaction of the neo-platonic monism of the Islamic followers of Greek philosophers to the Ash'arite *kalam*. *Kalam*, or theology, stressed the idea of One God and denied the independent existence of created things. In contrast with God, said the Ash'arites and also the Sufi followers of the concept of *wahdat al wujud*, the created world is not permanent. The mystics then came to the ultimate conclusion that the illusion of empirical existence must obliterate itself (*fana'*) in the only Existence, which remains (*baqa'*), that is, the existence of God.

The concept of *wahdat al wujud*, developed by Ibn 'Arabi (13th century) influenced all subsequent Sufi movements till the time Ahmad Sirhindi (17th century) strongly opposed it. The Naqshbandis, the Sufi order to which Ahmad Sirhindi belonged, profess *wahdat al shuhud*, while all the other orders on the Indian subcontinent (Chishtiya, Suhrawardiya, Qadriya) adhere to the concept of *wahdat al wujud*.

The Chishti Order

Muinuddin Chishti

THE CHISHTI ORDER bears the name of Chisht, a town in Khurasan, which lies about one hundred kilometres east of Herat. The spiritual founder of the order was Khwaja Abu Ishaq Shami (d. 940) who came from Syria and settled for a while in Chisht. He was a disciple and a *khalifah* of Mimshad Dinwari, (the latter being a *khalifah* of Hubayra of Basra and a disciple of Junayd of Baghdad). He traced his spiritual lineage through Hasan Basri back to Ali ibn Abu Talib and the Prophet Muhammad, and is believed to be ninth after Ali in the line of spiritual succession. Muinuddin Chishti belonged to this *silsila* and is credited with bringing it to India, where it went on to become one of the most influential orders.

Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti (1141-1235) was born in Sijistan (Sistan) and brought up in Khorasan. He was only fifteen when his father died leaving him in possession of a garden and a water mill. The economic situation of his family deteriorated with his father's death, so he had to work in the garden himself. One day while he was working, a *majzub* (ecstatic) named Ibrahim Qanduzi came into the garden. The young Khwaja was polite and well-mannered. Not only did he offer the dervish a seat under a shady tree but also brought him a bunch of grapes to eat. The dervish recognized the spiritual potential of the boy standing in front of him. He took some sesame seeds out of his bag, chewed them and put them in Muinuddin's mouth. Once Muinuddin ate the seeds, a spiritual connection was established, and Muinuddin's latent spirituality was awakened. This experience had such an impact on him that he sold his possessions and distributed the money among the poor.

This version of the story of how he came to renounce the world is considered to be the most authentic. The untimely death of his father might have indeed fostered his serious and introspective temperament, and urged him to devote his life to a higher purpose. It might have been the shock of death that took him, a boy immersed in the world, from all that was mundane and brought him into the realm of the spiritual. And it might have been the visit of Khwaja Ibrahim that finally encouraged him to detach his mind and heart from earthly pursuits and devote himself to the spiritual life he had sought all along.

He left his home and began to wander from place to place in search of knowledge. For many years he lived in Balkh, Samarqand and Bhukhara, studying the Qur'an, *hadith*, *fiqh* and theology. From there he travelled to Harwan, a suburb of Nishapur, where he met Shaykh Usman Harwani, a Sufi who became his spiritual mentor. Under his tutelage he practiced rigorous spiritual exercises for two and a half years. On completing his training, he was given a *khirqa* (gown) by the Shaykh and appointed his *khalifah*. From then onwards he was allowed to train his own disciples.

On leaving Harawan, he proceeded towards Baghdad. On the way he stopped to meet great shaykhs and seek spiritual guidance from them. For almost two months he stayed in Jil with Shaykh Abdul Qadir Jilani, the spiritual founder of the Qadri *silsila*. He travelled in this manner for several years, till he came to Lahore where his wanderings were halted for a while. He stayed in the compound of the tombs of Shaykh Husain Zanjani, Lal Qalandar and Shaykh 'Ali Hujwiri. From Lahore he set out for Delhi. By that time, Muslims having already conquered it, it was under the rule of Qutbuddin Aibak, a general of Muhammad Ghauri. Being himself a native of Central Asia, Muinuddin found Delhi familiar, as it was teeming with nobles, scholars and soldiers all hailing from the same area.

Medieval times saw a considerable movement of people across the entire inhabited world. Some were princes in search of lands to be conquered, other were mercenaries, traders, mystics, scholars – all on the lookout for opportunities. Travelling in search of knowledge was well looked upon. The Sufi tradition encouraged one to undertake journeys in order to profit from the learning and experience of saints scattered all over the Muslim world. Travel in search of knowledge was therefore also a priority for Khwaja Muinuddin who, in the course of the long journey across Asia, right from Khorasan to Baghdad and then on to Delhi, had the opportunity to meet many great luminaries and derive immense benefits from these meetings.

When he reached Delhi, he was already a well-known Sufi and his fame preceded him. He drew crowds wherever he went. He was a great humanitarian and a well-wisher of his fellow men, caring not only for their spiritual uplift, but also for their physical well-being. It was precisely for this reason that he was so well loved, and such great claims were made on his attention. He soon realized that he had hardly any time left for spiritual devotions; after a few months, therefore, he decided to leave Delhi for Ajmer, a town in the interior of Rajasthan.

He settled in Ajmer around 1206 and found it to be fertile ground for his teachings. The area already had some converts to Islam, both from the lower as well as the upper classes. But this would not have been the main reason for his choice of location, for among other things, he did not believe that the formal acceptance of Islam was necessary to become his follower and a Sufi. Therefore, his choice of Ajmer as his ultimate destination must

have been influenced primarily by its remoteness. It lay far away from the usual routes and was free of the intense political activity that marked big urban centres like Lahore or Delhi, which the founders of the Chishti orders abhorred. This decision, then, followed the traditions laid down by the founders of the Chishti order.

Khwaja Muinuddin's simple, ascetic life attracted all and sundry, irrespective of their religion. The Muslims and the Hindus, the conqueror and the conquered, all were reminded of the social and moral values, which were universal in nature. The Khwaja did not attach importance to material power and wealth. He laid stress only on piety, simplicity, lawful earning, devotion to God and service to mankind. His teachings thus appealed to all: Hindus and Muslims, rich and poor, high and low. He addressed basic human nature, which is common to all human beings.

He believed, like Rabia Basri, in the concept of ecstatic love for God. He held that one who loved God in the true sense could not fail to love His creatures. According to him, the most exalted kind of worship was to help the poor and the needy and to feed the hungry. These are his precepts as recorded in *Siyar al Awliya* (1388): "If one wishes to protect himself from this conflagration (of hell) he must worship Allah. There is no better way than this." He was asked what was meant by this kind of worship: "To listen to the plight of the oppressed, to help the needy and to fill the stomachs of the hungry. The man who does these three things may consider himself a friend of Allah. Firstly, he should have generosity like a river; secondly, kindness like the sun and, thirdly, humility like the earth. The man who is blessed is the man who is generous. The man who is respected is the man who is clean. The man who removes the burden of others is the real

mutawaqil. To be firm in the Way depends on two things: to respect the services of Allah and to pay homage to Allah.”¹

Muinuddin did not leave any writing of his own, but his teachings and traditions are best preserved in *Surus us Sudur*, the *Malfuzaat* (sayings and discourses) of his main disciple and *khalifah* Shaikh Hamidudin Nagauri, as recorded by his grandson. According to Khwaja Muinuddin, one who wants to pursue the Way must fulfill the following conditions: one should not earn money; one should not borrow money; one should not, if one has eaten nothing, even for seven days, reveal this to anyone or seek help from anyone; if one receives plenty of food, money, grain or clothing, one should not keep anything for the following day; one should not curse anyone and if anyone is hurt by an enemy, one should pray to God to guide the enemy towards the right path; if one performs a virtuous deed, one should consider that the source of the virtue is either one’s *pir*’s kindness, the intercession of the Prophet Muhammad on one’s behalf, or divine mercy; if one performs an evil deed one should consider one’s evil self responsible for the action, and try to protect oneself from such deeds; fearing God, one should be careful to avoid actions that might involve one again in evil; having fulfilled all the above conditions, one should regularly fast during the day and spend the night in prayer; one should remain quiet, and speak only when it is imperative to do so. The *shariah* makes it unlawful both to talk incessantly and keep totally silent. One should utter only such words as those that please God.²

¹ Siyar al Arifin, p.43, quoted from Currie, P.M., The Shrine and Cult of Mu’in al din Chishti of Ajmer, Delhi, 1992, p. 27. The relevant portions of Siyar al Arifin are quoted in this book in extenso. See also

Surus us Sudur, pp. 46-47, which is one of the most reliable sources on the life of Muinuddin Chishti. being a record of the conversations and sayings of Hamiduddin Nagauri, a *khalifah* of Muinuddin. The work is extant as an MS in the Habibganj collection, Aligarh Muslim University

² Surus us Sudus, pp.51-52, quoted from Rizvi, S.A.A., A History of Sufism in India, 1978, pp. 123-124

Muinuddin was celibate till he settled in Ajmer, where he married twice. His first wife was the daughter of a brother of the local governor. His second wife was the daughter of a local Hindu chieftain.

The Khwaja's followers, which included both Hindus and Muslims, found in him a sincere and caring guide. The then Hindu society was shackled by a rigid caste system that classified people as either high or low born. Justice was not done to the lower classes, for they were regarded as being of inferior birth, and therefore inherently debased. When people of the lower classes saw that the Khwaja treated all human beings alike, without the slightest discrimination, nothing could stop them from flocking to him. He looked after the poor and needy as if they were his own kith and kin. Not only did he fulfill their physical requirements, but he also took care of their spiritual needs. However, he never attempted to convert them to Islam. It was the Islamic concept of the equality of all human beings that played the greatest role in bringing them into the fold of Islam. They themselves found irresistible a religion that treated everyone on an equal footing. Even today both Hindus and Muslims throng his shrine in Ajmer and many believe he intercedes with God on their behalf, caring for them as much as he cared while still alive. He was and still is popularly known as Khwaja Gharib Nawaz.

Thus the stay of Khwaja Muinuddin in Ajmer brought about a far-reaching spiritual and social revolution (K. A. Nizami), and his teachings still form the most important part of the Chishti way of life. He died in Ajmer at the age of 97 and was buried there. Khwaja Husain Nagauri later built a tomb over his grave.

Khwaja Muinuddin had two highly able and talented disciples—Shaykh Hamiduddin of Nagaur and Shaykh Qutbuddin Bakhtiar Kaki, who lived in Delhi. They were his main *khalifas* who carried on his *silsila*.

Hamduddin Nagauri

Hamduddin Nagauri was born in Delhi some time after its conquest in 1192. It is said that his father, Ahmad, came from Lahore and settled in Delhi soon after Muslim rule was established in India. His education was traditional and included Arabic, Persian and the religious sciences. Later on he acquired a good command over the Hindavi dialect used in Rajasthan. He became a disciple of Muinuddin Chishti and stayed with him in Ajmer.

Shaykh Hamiduddin was of a highly spiritual disposition and lived a very simple and austere life. Although the Chishti saints were allowed to receive unsolicited gifts (*futuh*) to support themselves, he preferred to work for his living. He had a small plot of land in a village called Suwali near Nagaur. He supported himself solely on the income from this land and did not accept any offerings.

He followed the principle that no harm should be done to any form of life. His keen sensitivity is evident in the fact that he himself was a vegetarian, and he asked his followers too to follow the same path.

The Sufis were, indeed, humanitarians par excellence. They did not restrict the ambit of their love to Muslims alone, but embraced all human beings for the simple reason that they were all God's creatures, and one who loved God in the true sense could never despise any of His creatures. These noble values, cherished by the Sufis, were in fact so contagious that Islam spread among the masses like wildfire.

Shaykh Hamiduddin was a religious scholar with a good grasp of Islamic

³ Surur us Sudur, p.124

sciences. He was convinced that ignorance was the greatest curse and once likened human beings without knowledge to fossils.³ He believed that when a person well-versed in the law acted against its provisions, he committed one sin. But an ignorant person breaking the law was guilty of two sins, the one of breaking it and the second of ignorance.

He maintained that the *shariah* and *tariqa* were interrelated, just as the body and soul are. Treading the path of God and the Prophet meant severing all relations with anything that was not God. That is to say, man should ideally pass each and every moment immersed in thoughts of God, and all his words and deeds should conform to the will of God. If one were involved in the world, one would not be able to concentrate solely on God. Having said that, the question of human beings having a physical existence and needing worldly things for their sustenance could not be ignored. They could not cut themselves off from ordinary existence and still survive. On this score, the Sufis maintained that they were allowed to take from the world only what was necessary for their survival.

Hamiduddin was against hoarding anything, even for the next day. He felt that this was the mentality of greed that could never be abated. No matter how much wealth one were to hoard, one would always be looking for more. Therefore, one should stop looking for contentment in worldly riches, and set one's sight on spiritual gain, for that alone could give true fulfillment. This would be beneficial not only in this world but also in the hereafter. As Hamidudin followed strictly what he preached, his shaiykh, Muinuddin Chishti, bestowed on him the title of 'King of Hermits' (*Sultan ul Taarikin*).

Hamidudin was thus very clear in his views on wealth: he detested hoarding, and accumulation of wealth was anathema to him. He corresponded with Shaykh Bahauddin Zakariya of the Suhrawardi *silsila* in Multan to

ascertain the attitude of the Suhrawardi order on this issue. The exchange of letters as well as the conversation between the two, held when they met at a *mahzar* in Delhi, is recorded in *Surur us Sudur*. Apparently Hamiduddin told Bahauddin: “Wealth is a serpent and one who stores wealth in fact rears a serpent.” Shaykh Bahauddin, who was very rich, as his order interpreted austerity differently from the Chishtis, was not convinced by this argument and replied: “Your achievement as a dervish is not endowed by such beauty and elegance as to be immune from the evil eye, but our achievements as dervishes are endowed with such great beauty as to cause no harm, even if the whole of the world’s blackness were applied to its face.” Shaykh Hamiduddin ended the dispute by saying that the Suharwardis’ achievements as dervishes were not higher than those of the Prophet Muhammad, who had often remarked that his poverty was his pride. The conclusiveness of this argument left Shaykh Bahauddin speechless.⁴

Shayh Hamiduddin shunned fame. He once observed: “The Sufis who seek fame in their own lifetime were soon forgotten, while those who refrain from worldly fame and honour achieve long-lasting fame on their death.”⁵ He considered self-effacement a prerequisite for communion with God. True peace could be attained only by divine grace and, to secure divine grace, the renunciation of all worldly concerns was a *sine qua non*.

Shaykh Hamiduddin died in November 1274 and was buried in Nagaur. Sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq built a tomb over his grave.

Spiritual Disciples of Hamiduddin Nagauri

A number of Shaykh Hamiduddin’s descendants continued his mission and Nagaur developed into a strong centre of Sufism. This was to a great extent due to Khwaja Husain Nagaur, a descendant of Shaykh Hamiduddin.

⁴ *Surur us Sudur*, pp. 86-87

⁵ *Fawaidul Fuad*, pp. 4-5

Khwaja Husain followed in the footsteps of Shaykh Hamiduddin and lived a very simple life. He cultivated the land himself and whatever money he received from Sultan Ghiyasuddin Khilji of Malwa (1469-1501) was spent on constructing the tomb of Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti in Ajmer and the gateway of Hamiduddin's tomb in Nagaur. He was also a great religious scholar. He wrote a commentary on the Qur'an entitled *Nur un Nabi*, and compiled a number of treatises on Sufism. He also wrote a biography of Al Ghazali. He attached great importance to education, and devoted himself to the religious and spiritual uplift of the people.

Khwaja Ziyauddin Nakhshabi (d. 1351) was the best-known disciple of Shaykh Farid, the grandson of Hamiduddin. He was a scholar and a Sufi poet. His book, titled *Silk us Suluk* ('String of Sufism') deals with the basic principles of the Sufi mission in 151 short chapters. He regarded a good knowledge of the *shariah* as necessary to an understanding of Sufism.

It is interesting to note that in one of the treatises he advises the *ulama* to follow the Sufis in the path of renunciation and the Sufis to follow the *ulama* on religious matters. He goes on to say: "Without some of the qualities of a dervish, an *alim* is like an animal and a dervish without *ilm* (knowledge) is not worthy of undertaking his spiritual journey."

A well-known work of Nakhshabi's, *Tuti Nama* ('Stories of a Parrot'), is based on the Persian version of the Sanskrit work titled *Suka Saptati*. Nakhshabi rearranged the latter and made several changes in it. His style is lucid and very readable. On the whole his writings show that, according to him, Islam was a religion that advocated a middle path. He maintained that the Prophet of Islam wanted people to follow the path of moderation, which was good for them both in this world as well as in the next.

Khwaja Qutbuiddin Bakhtiar Kaki

The Chishti order became firmly established in Ajmer and Nagaur, thanks to the efforts respectively of Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti and his disciple, Hamiduddin Nagauri. The disciples who succeeded them worked hard to spread the teachings of the order further afield.. One of them was Khwaja Qutbuiddin Bakhtiar Kaki, who established a strong Chishti centre in Delhi.

By the time Khwaja Qutbuiddin came to Delhi, the political scene had undergone a change. Sultan Shamsuiddin Iltutmish (1210-35) had made the city his capital, for Delhi was the only remaining island of peace in the entire region. The Mongols had invaded Central Asia and Iran, which meant that the Muslims in those areas lost their political power. People therefore flocked to Hindustan and its new capital. These included a large number of princes, nobles, scholars and Sufis, all of them looking for a safe haven.

It was against this backdrop that Qutbuiddin Bakhtiar Kaki arrived in Delhi. He was born in Ush, in the Central Asian province of Jaxartes. His father died when he was 18 months old and it fell to his mother to see to his religious education. Legendary accounts tell of his spiritual initiation at the hands of Khizr. When he grew up, his mother arranged his marriage, but he took no interest in family life, so he divorced his wife and left for Baghdad. There, in a mosque, he met Khwaja Muinuddin. Greatly impressed, he became his disciple. After Khwaja Muinuddin left Baghdad, Qutubuddin went to Multan, where he met Shaykh Bahauddin Zakariya. He stayed in Multan for several years and when the Mongols threatened the area, he left for Delhi. Sultan Iltutmish gave him a warm welcome, and many eminent people came to him for spiritual guidance. He was keen on joining his spiritual mentor, Khwaja Muinuddin, in Ajmer but the Khwaja did not

allow him to come and stay with him, for he believed that there was a greater need for Qutbuddin in Delhi. Delhi had received an influx of newcomers, including a number of religious scholars, and the message of the order had to be communicated to them.

The large number of people who visited Khwaja Qutbuddin for guidance is testimony to his immense popularity amongst the masses as well as the elite. He was, like most of the Sufis, a humanitarian in the real sense of the word, always advising his disciples to help the poor and the needy as much as possible. Not surprisingly, when offered the post of *Shaikh ul Islam* by the Sultan, he refused.

The Khwaja regarded the *sama'* (a spiritual musical recital) as an effective means of inducing a mystical state of ecstasy. On this account the *ulama* opposed him. When the controversy intensified, Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti came to Delhi to look into the matter. Concerned for his disciple, he decided to take Qutbuddin away with him. Members of the public were so pained to see the Khwaja leaving town that a large number of them followed him with tears in their eyes to bid him farewell. Khwaja Muinuddin was so greatly moved at this sign of affection showered on Qutbuddin by the people, that he allowed him to return to them.

Khwaja Qutbuddin spent most of his time in devotion, fasting and prayer, and had no time to earn a living. His family lived in poverty, often having to borrow money for their immediate needs from a Muslim grocer, consequently repaying him as soon as they could. It seems that most of the time all they could afford was plain bread. That was how the Khwaja came to be known as 'Kaki' ('Man of Bread').

The story goes that the death of the Khwaja occurred while he was taking part in a *sama'* in the *khanqah* (shrine) of Shaykh Ali Sijzi. At the recital of this verse: "The martyrs of the dagger of *taslim* (surrender) get a

new life each moment from the unseen world,”⁶ the Khwaja entered an ecstatic state, from which he did not recover. He died on November 27, 1235, and was buried in Mehrauli.

Khwaja Qutbuddin had a number of disciples, two of whom are well known: Shaykh Badruddin of Ghazna and Shaykh Fariduddin Ganj Shakar of Punjab. Badruddin loved to take part in the *sama'* and danced with abandon when in the ecstatic state. Unlike the other Chishti Sufis, he had political associations. These associations did not, however, help the Chishti order in Delhi of which he was taking charge. He died in 1258-59 and was buried near the tomb of Khwaja Qutbuddin Bakhtiar Kaki. Thereafter, the Chishti order was destined to grow in the propitious atmosphere of Ajodhan, the home of Baba Farid Ganj Shakar.

Fariduddin Ganj Shakar

Shaykh Fariduddin (1175-1265) was the most famous amongst the disciples and *khalifas* of Khwaja Qutbuddin Bakhtiar Kaki. His ancestors were originally from Kabul, but settled near Lahore in Punjab in the middle of the 12th century. His father was a religious scholar and his mother a God-fearing woman who spent most of her time in devotions. Her great piety influenced her son, who did not take much interest in worldly activities, preferring ascetic practices and meditation. People took him to be an abnormal child.

When he was eighteen years old, he went to Multan and studied at a seminary in the mosque of Maulana Minhajuddin Tirmizi. It was here that he met Khwaja Qutbuddin Bakhtiar Kaki. He was so impressed by the Khwaja's spirituality that he became his disciple. After completing his studies, he went to Delhi and stayed in the Khwaja's *jamaat khana*, where he

⁶ Amir Hasan Sijzi, *Fawa'id ul Fuad*, pp.159-160

spent much time in ascetic exercises. With the permission of his Shaykh he even performed a *chilla*, that is, he spent forty days in solitary spiritual retreat, fasting and performing ascetic exercises.

When Khwaja Muinuddin of Ajmer visited Delhi, he met Fariduddin and was greatly impressed by him. He prophesied great spiritual attainment as his destiny.

Soon his fame spread far and wide and people began flocking to him. With all the attention he received, he found it difficult to engage in his usual devotions, so he left for Hansi in the Hisar district. He was not in Delhi when Khwaja Qutbuddin Bakhtiar Kaki died. On hearing the news, he left immediately for Delhi, reaching it in five days. It was the Khwaja's will that Baba Farid be his successor. Accordingly, Qadi Hamiduddin Nagauri, a great Sufi and a close associate of Nizamuddin, gave Baba Farid the relics of the Khwaja. These were his *khirqa* (gown), turban, stick and wooden sandals. Though this implied that Baba Farid should be the Khwaja's intended successor in Delhi, this did not turn out to be the case. Baba Farid was a person who advocated asceticism and abhorred the bustle of the world. He desired nothing more than to withdraw from it. Therefore, the Chishti centre in Delhi was entrusted to Shaikh Badruddin, another of the Khwaja's disciples; Baba Farid then left Delhi to settle at Ajodhan, where he remained until his death in 1265.

He lived in a small house built of mud and led a very simple and austere life. He was so committed to simplicity that he felt that even a house of bricks was not simple enough for an ascetic to live in. His meagre possessions consisted of a small rug and a blanket. He fasted often, breaking his fast with sherbet, wild fruits and bread made of millet.

His disciples, many of whom came from far-off places, ran the shrine, or *jamaat khana*. It consisted of a thatched hall used for communal living and a separate cell for Baba Farid's meditation. There was no furniture. Baba Farid slept on the floor and his visitors did likewise. The offerings received were either used by the disciples staying in the *jamaat khana* or were distributed among the poor and the needy. Nothing was kept for the next day. Doing so would have amounted to showing a lack of trust in God, for it is said clearly in the Qur'an that God takes the responsibility for providing for the needs of everyone on earth. So instead of spending one's time in hoarding wealth and investing it to multiply it further, one had better leave everything to God and spend one's time in His worship.

The *jamaat khana*, which was managed by Badruddin Ishaq, was situated at a central place, and received a large number of visitors every day. They were people from all sections of society, from scholars and merchants to Sufis and *qalandars*. Some desired to stay for a while, while others sought Baba's blessings and departed. Many came for *tawiz* (amulet) to ward off different ills. With the scores of people visiting him daily — thanks to his popularity — Shaykh Fariduddin found little time for prayers and meditation. He ultimately decided, therefore, to leave his house.

One special characteristic of the life of the *jamaat khana* was that people were free to discuss different issues. Nizamuddin Awliya's *Malfuzaat* (conversations) mentions these discussions, which occasionally were held between Muslims and non-Muslims, such as the yogis, who would talk about their practices aimed at self-control.

Shaykh Farid did not involve himself in politics. He kept himself aloof from those in power. In most cases, they held him in high esteem, except for one Sher Khan, the governor of Multan. On seeing that the governor

was unhappy with him, the merchants and the wealthy people stopped sending offerings to the *jamaat khana*. This caused great hardship to those staying there.

Whenever anyone wanted spiritual help, Baba Farid was always accessible and obliging, irrespective of whether the seeker was a commoner or a member of the nobility. He was so concerned with the spiritual well-being of the people that he even tolerated their rude behaviour. He never discriminated between individuals, paying no heed to whether they were Muslims or non-Muslims. For him, all were human beings and thus deserved equal attention. A very interesting story is recorded in *Fawa'id ul Fuad*.⁷ Once a knife was once presented to Baba Farid. He returned it, saying that he would have preferred a needle instead. A knife was used to cut things up, while needles stitched them together. He said that he was there not to cut up hearts but to mend them.

This was the attitude not only of Baba Farid, but also of the Sufis in general and for this reason the activities of the Sufis went a long way towards easing the tensions between the Hindus and Muslims of the subcontinent. The Muslims, who were regarded as foreign invaders, came to be seen also as spiritual healers to whom people thronged for blessings. The Sufis on their part kept their doors open to all and at all times. This was one of the reasons why the lower classes, in particular, those who had been neglected for centuries, came strongly under their influence. In effect, the hearts of the people were touched by the Sufi teachings, based as they were on moral and spiritual values. A great number even converted to the faith.

Baba Farid was a scholar, who also wrote poetry in Arabic, Persian and

⁷ *Fawa'id ul Fuad*, p. 239

the local dialect known as Hindawi. He popularized the study of the *Awariful Ma'arif*, the manual of the Sufis written by Suhrawardi, and lectured on the philosophy of the *Lawa'ih* of Qadi Hamiduddin Nagauri, known also as Shaikh Muhammad 'Ata. Qadi Hamiduddin had known the Khwaja when both were in Baghdad and later on came to Delhi and settled there.⁸

In spite of his learning, Baba Farid was very humble. He held the *ulama* in high regard but felt that they were not humble enough — unlike the Sufis — to give proper guidance to the people. They neither mixed with them, nor encouraged them to ask questions and seek clarifications. He disapproved of this self-righteous indifference towards the common man on the part of the *ulama*. The Sufis, essentially humanitarian in outlook, differed from secular humanitarians in the sense that while the latter would be concerned with the welfare of the people in this world alone, they, the Sufis, were deeply concerned with the good of the people both in this world as well as in the next. To Baba Farid, the aim of Sufism, with its core values of humility, modesty, patience, fortitude and purity of heart, was to prepare the individual to lead a pious life within society.

Shaykh Farid explained the difference between the way of the law, or *shariah*, the way of the Sufi striving, or *tariqa*, and the attainment of Ultimate Truth, or *haqiqah*, using as illustration *zakat*, the obligatory donation to charity to be made from the income of each individual Muslim “The *zakat*, according to the *shariah*, is five dirhams out of 200, the *zakat*, according to *tariqa*, involves the payment of 195 dirhams out of 200 and the *zakat* required by *haqiqah* entails the payment of everything, retaining nothing for oneself.”⁹

⁸See the chapter on the Suhrawardi silsila. Qadi Hamiduddin Nagauri was a Suhrawardi, but was close to Chishti circles, and it was he who bestowed upon Baba Farid the relics of Bakhtiar Kaki after the latter's death. He was deeply interested in the Chishti practice of '*sama*.'
⁹ Fawaid ul Fuad, p . 117

Shaykh Farid took great pains in training his chief disciples, for it was they who would shoulder the responsibility of communicating the message to the people. He held the Sufi responsible for the worldly and spiritual well-being of his followers. This demanded a close relationship between the teacher and the taught, because only then could the latter have a proper understanding of moral values. However, he did not approve of too many formalities in the initiation of a disciple. He was opposed to the initiation custom of shaving the head of the novice. To him, true initiation consisted of merely holding the hands of the disciple and praying for his spiritual success.

Shaykh Farid had a large family. He had two wives and was survived by five sons and three daughters, some of his children having died in infancy. His eldest son, Nasiruddin, who was an agriculturalist, was a highly spiritual person. He spent much of his time engaged in prayer and meditation. Shaykh Nasiruddin's son, Shaykh Kamaluddin, settled in Dhar in Malwa. There he earned great renown as a Sufi and was popular both with the masses and the nobility. Sultan Mahmud Khilji of Malwa, one of his admirers, had a tomb erected over his grave.

His second son, Shihabuddin, was associated with Nizamuddin Awliya. The third son, Badruddin Sulaiman also followed the Chishti path. His family produced several renowned Sufis, owing to whom the Chishti order spread throughout India. Badruddin's son, Shaikh Alauddin, a great Sufi of his times, spent his whole life engaged in spiritual exercises aimed at self-mortification. He was held in high esteem by Sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq, who built a tomb for him after his death near the burial place of his grandfather.

Of Shaykh Farid's three daughters, one, Bibi Sharifa was widowed at an early age and did not remarry. She dedicated herself to a life spent in

prayer and *dhikr* (remembrance). Shaikh Farid often said that if women could be *khalifas*, she would definitely qualify for this honour.

Baba Farid had seven very distinguished *khalifah*, Shaikh Nizamuddin Awliya being the most prominent.

The Khalifas of Baba Farid

On the authority of Amir Khwurd, author of *Siyar al Awliya'* (1388), Baba Farid had only seven *khalifas*, for not all his disciples qualified for the title of *khalifah*. The disciples were classified into three different groups on the basis of how they were chosen to become disciples. The most outstanding of these were the ones whom God had inspired the Shaykh to select. These were the *Rahmani Khalifas*. The second group was formed of those whom the Shaykh chose himself on the basis of their personal merits, while the third group consisted of disciples whom the Shaykh accepted on the recommendation of others. According to Amir Khwurd, only those of the first two groups were *khalifas* in the true sense.

Shaykh Najibuddin Matawakkil, a younger brother of Baba Farid and his *khalifah*, lived in Delhi and led the life of an ascetic. He was learned, very pious and extremely poor. He had many disciples. From time to time he visited Ajodhan to receive the blessings of Baba Farid. He died in Delhi and his grave is located close to that of Khwaja Qutbuddin. Sultan Mohammad bin Tughlaq built a tomb over his grave.

Maulana Badruddin Ishaq, another *khalifah* of Shaykh Farid as well as being the Shaykh's son-in-law, managed the affairs of the *jamaat khana* in Ajodhan, where he used to teach the Qur'an. He was also a resident of Delhi and had received a proper religious education. He died soon after his mentor's death.

Shaykh Jamaluddin of Hansi was both a scholar and a poet. Before he became the Khwaja's disciple, he had been a rich man, but later renounced all material comforts for the sake of spiritual gain. The Khwaja trusted him in all matters, even authorizing him to endorse the *khilafat namas* issued to the disciples by the Khwaja. Two of his books, *Mulhimat*, a collection of Sufi aphorisms written in Arabic, and his *Diwan*, written in Persian, have survived.

Shaykh Jamaluddin used to visit the Khwaja in Ajodhan throughout his life time. When he became very old and could not travel himself, he used to send his maidservant to present his respects to the Khwaja. After Shaykh Jamaluddin died, the maidservant brought the Shaykh's son, Burhanuddin, to Baba Farid. To her and everyone else's great surprise, he made him his *khalifah*. When it was pointed out to him that Badruddin was very young, Baba Farid replied that the crescent of Islam was also small.¹⁰

Shaykh Arif was another *khalifah*, who was deputed to Sind. Finding himself unable to perform the requisite duties, he came to Baba Farid, asking to be excused. Baba Farid then advised him to go on a pilgrimage.

Another *khalifah* was the famous Sufi, Shaykh Alauddin Ali Sabir, the founder of the Sabiri branch of the Chishti order. His tomb is in Kaliyar, near Roorkee in U.P.

However, the most famous of them all was Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya.

Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya

Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya (1238-1325), the celebrated *khalifah* of Baba Farid, was and remains one of the most popular mystics of medieval India. His grandfather migrated to India from Bhukhara in Central Asia and settled

¹⁰ Siyar al Awliya, pp. 178-84

in Badayun. Nizamuddin was born there in 1238. His father died when he was hardly five years old. His mother, a very pious lady, spared no effort in giving her son the best education available in Badayun. First he learned and memorized the Qur'an. Then he studied the books of *fiqh*. Subsequently, at the age of 16, he was allowed to go to Delhi for further studies. There he happened to stay in the neighbourhood of Shaykh Najibuddin Matawakkil, a younger brother and a *khalifah* of Baba Farid. By then he had mastered the *hadith* and *fiqh*. On the strength of these accomplishments, he felt he might be able to secure the position of a Qadi, for his family, now reaching the point of near starvation, was in dire need of resources. He therefore requested Shaykh Najibuddin to pray for his appointment, but the Shaykh, well known for his spirituality and austerity, discouraged him from aspiring to a worldly post.

Under the influence of Shaykh Najibuddin and after hearing about Baba Farid from him, Nizamuddin finally decided to take up the life of a dervish. He left Delhi for Ajodhan in 1257 to meet Shaykh Fariduddin personally. Baba Farid, quick to gauge his spiritual potential, gave him a warm welcome, and initiated him into the order. Nizamuddin showed great interest in learning ascetic exercises. He spent most of his time in fasting, prayer and meditation, for Baba Farid told him: "Fasting is the first half of the path the Sufi chooses for himself, and prayers and pilgrimages the other half." However, when Nizamuddin became inclined to give up his studies and dedicate himself totally to superogatory prayers, Baba Farid discouraged him from doing so, for he believed that the one complemented the other. Genuine Sufis have generally attached great importance to religious education. Once Nizamuddin Awliya remarked: "An illiterate Shaykh is overcome by Satan. A good background of religious education serves as a strong defence to ward off the temptations of Satan."

In 1265 Nizamuddin visited Baba Farid again. During his second visit Baba Farid taught him some chapters of the Qur'an, highlighting the spiritual aspects of the verses. He also taught him *Awariful Maarif* of Suhrawardi and *Tamhid* of Abu Shakur. Now Nizamuddin's training was almost complete. On his third visit, in 1265, he was given the *khilafat nama* by Baba Farid. This put on record the fact that he had completed his spiritual course under Baba Farid and had permission to disseminate his teachings. Baba also advised him to lead an ascetic life and gave him his blessings in these beautiful words:

“You will be a tree under whose shadow the people will find rest... You should strengthen your spirits by devotion to God... I have handed over all these things to you for, at the time of my death, you will not be present.”¹¹

After his return from Ajodhan, Nizamuddin stayed in the city of Delhi for some time, but he had no place of his own where he could make a permanent home. He had no income either. He could not earn any money, as all his time was spent in the study of the Qur'an, in prayer and in meditation. He lived therefore in straitened circumstances. Finally, he moved to Ghayaspur, a little known place, with no habitation or resources of any kind.

Sultan Muizzuddin Kaiqubad (1287-90), the successor of Balban, made Kili Khari his capital. It was only two kilometres away from Ghayaspur, which eventually became a busy suburb of Delhi. As a result, Nizamuddin wanted to move from there as well, but a fellow Sufi discouraged him from doing so by pointing out that, wherever he went, people would follow him. He asked him if he would spend his whole life moving from one place

¹¹ Siyar ul Awaliya, pp. 116-117

to another, and stressed that it was his duty to spread God's message when he had been given the ability and the opportunity to do so. In his case, fleeing from the public would amount to shirking his duty and would incur God's displeasure. Ultimately, Nizamuddin abandoned the idea. Under Sultan Alauddin Khalji (1296-1315) the locality became quite prosperous and densely populated. A number of people, both rich and poor, the common man and the elite, the soldiers and the powerful, started visiting him there.

Shaykh Nizamuddin's continuous efforts came to fruition as people began to change their lives. Many who had been Muslims only in name now had the opportunity to understand the true spirit of Islam and mend their ways. Non-Muslims were attracted by the moral and spiritual values taught by him. The majority of them finally entered his fold, impressed as they were by his personality, his genuineness, and particularly the spiritual interpretation he put upon the teachings of Islam.

Shaykh Nizamuddin had little regard for temporary rulers and showed no interest in building up good relations with the kings and nobility. Some sultans and noblemen had great regard for the Shaykh, while others, like Sultan Mubarak Shah and Ghyasuddin Tughlaq, took the Shaykh's disinterestedness to be a form of arrogance. They wanted to harm him but, by God's grace, they were unable to do so.

In actual fact, the popularity of Shaykh Nizamuddin was liked neither by the political nor the religious leaders. The *ulama* (religious scholars) became envious of him when they saw that even kings could do him no harm. They therefore made a religious issue of the controversial practice of *sama'* (spiritual musical recital) and lodged a complaint against him with the ruler, Ghyasuddin Tughlaq. The Sultan invited religious scholars to explain to him whether the *sama'* was Islamic or un-Islamic. The subject was discussed

at length. One Maulana Alamuddin, who was a grandson of Shaykh Bahauddin Zakariya, and who had even written a book on the subject of *sama*, explained it in detail and most probably to the sultan's satisfaction, for he did not take any action against Shaykh Nizamuddin. Thus this conspiracy against the Shaykh failed and he continued to work as before till his death in 1325. When he felt that the time to leave this world had come, he appointed his *khalifas* so that his mission would continue long after his death. He wished to be buried in the open, but that was not to be. Muhammad bin Tughlaq had a dome constructed over his grave and his tomb became a place of pilgrimage for both Hindus and Muslims, who continued to come to him to pay homage and receive his blessings.

Nizamuddin was extremely popular both during his lifetime and after his death. When he was alive, people flocked to him in such large numbers that he acquired vast experience in dealing with all types of individuals. Being unusually sensitive, he developed a deep insight into human nature and was able to satisfy most of his visitors. Even the religious scholars, who were very reluctant to acknowledge anyone, found his discourses inspiring. *Fawa'id ul Fuad* amply shows how adept he was at imparting spiritual instruction by illustrating his points with interesting anecdotes.

Shaykh Nizamuddin believed that, above all, one had to be a good human being and only then could one be a good Muslim or a good Hindu. He would often recount this *hadith* to his disciples: "Whatever you would not like to be done to yourself, do not wish it to happen to others. Wish for others what you wish for yourself." He was a humanitarian par excellence, attaching the greatest importance to the service of humanity, ranking it next only to the performance of obligatory worship.

In his eyes, renouncing the world was a great virtue. He felt that, without

this, one could not be a good believer. But renouncing the world did not mean going so far as to give up even the most basic of necessities. Renunciation, for him, meant that one's heart should be free from love of the world, for material greed was anathema to any kind of spiritual attainment. If one's mind was mired in material things, it lost the ability to focus properly on spiritual matters. He held that love of the world rendered prayers and fasting worthless. Once he defined renunciation, or a state of asceticism, as continuing to wear clothing and eating and drinking, but willingly distributing the surplus to the poor and needy, instead of saving it up for the following day.

He did not discriminate between people of different religions. To him all were God's creatures, equally worthy of respect and deserving of help. Consequently, Shaykh Nizamuddin's *langar* (free food) was served to both Hindus and Muslims.

There was not the slightest trace of the communal in the thinking of Shaykh Nizamuddin. He was the epitome of tolerance and broadmindedness and showed a total lack of any bias. Once, seeing a group of Hindus at worship, he observed: "Every community has its own path and faith, and its own way of worship." He taught his disciples to keep the peace at all times and to develop good relations with everyone, irrespective of caste, colour or creed, for Islam did not teach violence against or discrimination between human beings. Only *taqwa* (the virtue of being God-fearing) — and certainly not material grandeur — could raise one's status in the eyes of God. He thus devoted his entire life to bringing people closer to the true spirit of religion

Islam to him was not a set of hollow rites and rituals. It was rather a superior ethical code. At times he felt how unfortunate it was that Muslims, preoccupied as they were with the rituals of religion, failed to delve deeper

into the spirit of Islam, and this too despite the number of traditions that made it clear that God would not accept a prayer or a fast unless performed with the correct intention and in the correct spirit.

He held that *nafs* (the animal soul) was responsible for all evil and that this baser self could be controlled only by spiritual exercises, worship and meditation. He did not, however, ask his disciples to shirk their responsibilities towards their families. He knew full well that not everyone could become an ascetic. The only thing he disapproved of was the mentality that craved money in excess of actual need. For example, clothes were necessary to cover the body, but the greed to have more and more spare clothing, just to hoard it, was quite un-Islamic. Moreover, charity that was just for show undoubtedly incurred God's displeasure. All actions are ultimately judged by the underlying intentions. Only good acts done with the pure intention of pleasing God would merit any reward from Him.

Disciples of Shaykh Nizamuddin

Among the many disciples of Shaykh Nizamuddin, there were a few who were scholars and poets and whose works were either totally dedicated to the Shaykh or made frequent mention of him. It is these works that provide information about his life and his dealings with contemporaries, as well as historical details of the age. The most famous amongst them are Amir Khusro, Amir Najmuddin Hasan Sijzi and Ziyauddin Barni.

Amir Khusro (1253-1325), the famous Persian poet, was the Shaykh's most beloved disciple, who in return loved the Shaykh more than anyone else. He was of Turkish origin and his family came from Balkh in Central Asia. After the Mongol invasion his father, Amir Saifuddin Mahmud, migrated to India and it was here that Amir Khusro was born. He received

an excellent literary education. He was proficient in Persian and also knew some Turkish, as well as the Hindawi dialect spoken in Hindustan, but he failed to develop a taste for Arabic. He was a great favourite of the Delhi Sultans and served under many of them.

Amir Khusro is remembered above all as a poet, and Persian was his language of choice. He wrote *masnavis* (long narrative poems), shorter pieces of poetry collected in five *divans*, panegyrics and treatises. His style was unique and he charted a new path of stylistic expression, which he hoped his Indian successors would follow. He is considered to be the first to write in Hindi or Hindawi and some collections of verses in that language are ascribed to him. There is no doubt, however, that he used Hindi words and phrases in his Persian verses, an indication that he was very familiar with the local language and that it came to him spontaneously. It is said that Shaykh Nizamuddin never tired of listening to Khusro reciting his verses.

Besides being a prolific writer, he also invented several musical instruments including the sitar, and composed a number of melodies based on a mixture of Persian and Indian themes. The invention of *qawl* (a mode in music) is attributed to him. It was meant to introduce novelty into *sama'* rituals, in which he also participated. In spite of his many engagements at the court, he always managed to find time to visit his Shaykh. When the Shaykh died, he happened to be on an expedition to Bengal with Sultan Ghayasuddin Tughlaq. When he heard of his *pir's* death, he rushed back to Delhi. He could not bear the shock, and his sorrow was so overwhelming that he could not even weep. He lived on only for another six months. He died in September 1325 and was buried near his mentor. His tomb is a handsome edifice enclosed by marble screens and whoever visits the tomb of Nizamuddin Awliya pays his respects to his disciple as well.

Amir Najmuddin Hasan Sijzi (1254-1336), born in Badayun, was also, like Amir Khusro, a poet and a courtier. He wrote *qasidas*, or eulogistic poems, and *ghazals*. He became Shaykh Nizamuddin's disciple at the age of 52. His greatest contribution to posterity is the record he kept of the conversations (*malfuzaat*) of Nizamuddin Awliya, titled *Fawa'id ul Fuad*. This work is the main and most reliable source of information on the Shaykh. At one point, when he confided in his mentor that he could not put his mind to the performance of any prayers besides the obligatory prayers, as he would rather listen to *sama'*, the Shaykh advised him to devote more time to the recitation of the Qur'an than to the writing of poetry¹². Like his mentor, Hasan too did not marry. He died at Daulatabad in 1336.

Ziauddin Barni (d. 1357), the author of *Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi*, was one of the eminent *ulama* and scholars who accepted Shaykh Nizamuddin as their spiritual guide and regularly visited him. Barni wrote a book on Sufism, but it has not survived the ravages of time. Once Barni asked Shaykh Nizamuddin why he was not more discriminating in his acceptance of disciples. The Shaykh replied that it was true that previously the *pirs* had accepted only those disciples who showed total detachment from all that was not godly. But later, in the times of Shihabuddin Suhrawardi and Baba Farid, people came in multitudes to the Sufis seeking their guidance. They belonged to all classes, both the lower and the elite, and the Sufis enrolled them all as their disciples. These disciples refrained from indulging in sin, and offered prayers, both obligatory and non-obligatory. "If I were to impose difficult conditions on them, they would be deprived of even that level of piety," he remarked. He then added that his mentor, Baba Farid, had commanded him to refuse none who turned to him for guidance.

¹² Fawa'id ul Fu'ad, pg. 261

Evidently this was a valid point. The work of reform, which was largely a matter of internal discipline, could be performed only gradually. It would have been mere wishful thinking to expect people to become perfect in the span of a single day. Even the Qur'an endorsed this unhurried, patient way of doing things. For instance, drinking was banned in three stages. In any case, man being a thinking animal, could adopt something wholeheartedly only when his mind was satisfied that the path he was about to tread was the true one. Thus the rite of initiation into any order was not the end of the story. It was only the beginning. It was a vow to recondition the mind, and a resolve to sincerely follow the path shown by the mentor.

The Khalifas of Shaykh Nizamuddin

Shaykh Nizamuddin Auliya died in April 1325 but, till December 1324, he had appointed only three or four *khalifas*. In that month he decided to appoint a few more and a list was drawn up in consultation with senior disciples. A model *khilafat nama* was drafted by Maulana Fakhruddin Zarradi, copies were made by Saiyid Husain, and signed by the copyist and Shaykh Nizamuddin Auliya. These khilafat namas are dated 20 Zul hijja 724 AH (8 December 1324) but a controversy developed over their authenticity, as some of the Chishti Sufis alleged that the Shaykh did not sign them in a state of full consciousness.

At the time of Nizamuddin's death, the Chishti community in Delhi was involved in yet another crisis. In that year Muhammad bin Tughlaq ascended the throne of the Delhi Sultanate. He was filled with great ambitions and had plans for territorial expansion of the empire both to the west of the Indus and to the south in the Deccan. To facilitate the subjugation of the Deccan, he established a new capital, Daulatabad, which he planned

to populate by shifting most of the population of Delhi to this new destination. This shift was supposed to include religious scholars and the Sufis. Thus, the activities of the *khalifas* of Shaykh Nizamuddin must be seen against this historical backdrop.

The main *khalifas* who contributed to spreading the Chishti order and its ideas over a large geographical area were: Qadi Muhiuddin Kashani, Maulana Wajihuddin Yusuf, Maulana Shamsuddin, Shaykh Qutbuddin Munawwar, Maulana Husamuddin of Multan, Maulana Fakhruddin Zarradi, Maulana Alauddin Nili, Maulana Burhanuddin Gharib, Shaykh Akhi Sirajuddin Usman and Shaykh Nasiruddin Mahmud Chiragh.

Qadi Muhiuddin Kashani was one of Shaykh Nizamuddin's senior khalifas. After becoming the Shaykh's disciple, he abandoned worldly life in favour of asceticism. The Shaykh accorded him great respect and it is on record that he wrote out his khilafat nama with his own hands adding at the bottom:

“Lead the life of an ascetic; pay no attention to the things of this world and its authorities. Do not accept gifts from the rulers.”

Maulana Wajihuddin Yusuf was a *khalifah* whom the Shaykh delegated to Chanderi to accompany the imperial army whose task it was to win the area for the Sultan. The military commander of Sultan Alauddin Khilji had specifically asked Nizamuddin Auliya to send him one of his disciples for spiritual support, and the Shaykh had obliged.

Maulana Shamsuddin, son of Yahya, came from Awadh and settled in Delhi, becoming one of the most humble and devoted disciples living in the *jamaat khana*.

Shaykh Qutbuddin Munawwar was the son of Shaykh Burhanuddin of Hansi, who at a very young age had been appointed the *khalifah* of Baba

Farid, the *murshid* of Nizamuddin Auliya. The son in turn became the *khalifah* of Shaykh Nizamuddin, who allowed him to reside in Hansi, his ancestral town. When he was about to leave Delhi and return to Hansi, Shaykh Nizamuddin gave him the copy of the *Awariful Marif*, which his grandfather, Shaykh Jamaluddin, who was also a *khalifah* of Baba Farid, had given the Shaykh to pass on to his grandson. It had originally belonged to Baba Farid, who presented it to Shaykh Jamaluddin at the time of conferring the *khilafat nama* on him.

Maulana Husamuddin of Multan, a scholar, was a notable *khalifah*, who refused to use the title *shaykh*, believing it to be too lofty for him, and preferring the simple title of *mulla*. On becoming a *khalifah*, he requested the Shaykh to let him settle in a lonely place on the bank of the river. The Shaykh refused to give his permission, saying that such a move would lead to fame and people would start gathering around him.

Maulana Husamuddin was married, but lived a very simple life. His dwelling was a thatched hut. He had no servants and was often in financial distress. On one occasion, he asked the Shaykh what his views were on the issue of a Sufi accepting a loan. The Shaykh replied that there could be only two reasons for accepting a loan: one to maintain one's family and the other to provide for the needs of a traveller. However, the Shaykh added that loan seeking and repayment disturbed the spiritual routine of a dervish. Therefore, a true ascetic had better stay away from money matters.

On another occasion Shaykh Nizamuddin, addressing his disciples, a group which included Maulana Husamuddin, charted a six-point formula to facilitate the intense concentration on God by which a Sufi could realize his goal:

1. One should retire to a lonely place, without desiring any company or change.

2. One should always be in a state of cleanliness. One may sleep when necessary but, on rising, one should immediately perform one's ablutions.

3. One should keep an unbroken fast.

4. Either one should perform *dhikr* (remembrance of God) or remain silent.

5. While reciting *dhikr*, one should recollect in one's heart the presence of one's *pir* (spiritual mentor).

6. Every thought except that of God should be expelled.¹³

After moving his capital from Delhi to Daulatabad, Muhammad bin Tughlaq transferred the *ulama* and the Sufis, including Maulana Husamuddin, to the new location. Thereafter the Maulana left for Gujarat, where he lived till his death.

Maulana Fakhruddin Zarradi was an *alim* who was initially totally against Sufism. Nasiruddin, who came to be known later as Chiragh-i-Dilli (The Lamp of Delhi), was his classmate and it was he who persuaded him to visit the Shaykh. When he met Shaykh Nizamuddin, he was so impressed by his personality and his intellectual brilliance that he shaved his head, adopted celibacy and became his follower. He rented a house near the *jamaat khana*, so that he could remain close to his Shaykh. Most of his time was spent in prayer and it was not long before his fame spread far and wide.

Maulana Alauddin Nili, another *khalifah*, was widely known for his piety. He could not cope with the responsibilities of the world and spent most of his life shunning them. He busied himself reading the *malfuzaat* of his Shaykh,

¹³As recorded in the *Malfuzaat* of Sheikh Nasiruddin Chiragh, Kahirul Majaalis, pp. 68-69, ed. A.K.Nizami, Aligarh, 1959

Fawaid ul Fuad and it is said that he made the copy, from which he read, with his own hand.

Maulana Burhanuddin Gharib was yet another *khalifah*. He too was compelled to leave Delhi for Daulatabad. He became so well-known in the Deccan that Sultan Nasir Khan Faruqi (1399-1437), a ruler of Khandesh, later on built a town called Burhanpur in his name and made it his capital.

Maulana Burhanuddin is credited with having invented a new style of dancing during the ritual of *sama'*, which later on came to be known as Burhani.

Shaykh Akhi Sirajuddin Usman, was born in Lakhnauti in Bengal, and the story goes that when he came first to Delhi he was so young that he did not even have the shadow of a beard. He stayed in the *jamaat khana* of Shaykh Nizamuddin and was finally appointed his *khalifah* in spite of the initial reluctance on the part of the Shaykh to bestow the honour on him, as Akhi Sirajuddin was not well educated. After completing his studies, he left Delhi and went back to Lakhnauti. There he gained a great number of converts from all strata of society, including the rulers of Bengal.

Nasiruddin Muhammad Chiragh Dilli

Shaykh Nasiruddin Mahmud (1276-1356) was the most prominent of the *khalifas* of Nizamuddin Auliya. He was also his chief successor in Delhi and was popularly known as the *Chiragh-i-Dilli* (The Lamp of Delhi). He was born in Awadh in 1276. His father, who was an affluent wool merchant, died when he was nine years old. His mother wanted him to become an *alim*, but he was not interested in his studies and his heart was set on asceticism. By the time he was 25 years old, he was already deep into Sufi

practices and spent much of his time in self-mortification, fasting and prayers. His favourite retreats were tombs of the saints, isolated spots by rivers and the wilderness of the jungles.

Shaykh Nizamuddin had a number of followers in Awadh, where Nasiruddin Mahmud lived. At their instigation he decided to go to Delhi and become the Shaykh's disciple. He was 43 years old, well versed in ascetic exercises and ready to embark on the way of the Sufis. He was welcomed by the Shaykh and initiated into the *tariqa*.

Nasiruddin's life of prayer, meditation and solitude ill prepared him for an existence in an urban centre such as Delhi. Therefore, he begged his Shaykh to allow him to retire into a nearby wilderness. He was asked instead to remain in Delhi among the people and suffer whatever hardship that entailed as, according to the Shaykh, all kinds of experience were necessary for one's intellectual and spiritual development. Besides, those who had been blessed with the realization of God had a duty to guide the populace along the same path. If they shirked their duty by opting for a life of retirement, it would have amounted to risking divine displeasure.

Taking note of the popularity of the Sufis, Sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq tried to pressurize them into helping him in his ambitious schemes. He wanted both the Sufis and the *ulama* to move to his new capital and lead the masses there. Those who refused to do so had to suffer the displeasure and the anger of the Sultan. Shaykh Nasiruddin was also one of those under pressure, but somehow managed to escape going to Daulatabad.

After the sudden death of Sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq in 1351, Feroz, a cousin of his, succeeded him to the throne. This happened with the active help of the *ulama*, the Sufis and the courtiers. Feroz Tughlaq, feeling obliged

to them for his elevation, maintained good relations with the religious and spiritual leaders. He used to shower gifts on them, but Shaykh Nasiruddin continued to live the same life of poverty and austerity as before. When Sultan Feroz visited him, the Shaykh did not accord him any special treatment.

One day, while the Shaykh was engaged in solitary meditation, he was stabbed so grievously by a *qalandar* named Turab that the blood from his wound flowed all over the floor of his room. His disciples wanted to punish the *qalandar*, but he restrained them, saying that he had already forgiven him. The Shaykh survived the attack and his prayers and fasting continued as usual. He died three years later in September 1356.

Shaykh Nasiruddin had a large number of disciples, but either he did not consider any one of them worthy enough of inheriting the relics of his *pir*, Shaykh Nizamuddin, or he did not want to part with them, even after his death. So, according to his will, the relics were buried with his body. The *khirqa* was placed on his ribs, the staff was laid beside his body, his rosary wound around his forefinger, his bowl placed under his head and the wooden sandals on his chest. His final message to his disciples was:

“Everyone has to bear the burden of his own faith. There is no question of bearing the burden of others.”

Sultan Feroz built a tomb over his grave and the area where it is situated is known as Chiragh-i-Dilli.

The teachings of Shaykh Nasiruddin have been preserved in a book written by Hamid Qalandar and are known as *Khair-ul-Majaalis*. By that time, the tenets of the Chishti philosophy had already been fully developed.

There were two categories of followers. The first category was made up of the common people, who were expected to do some *wadifas* given to

them by their shaykhs, lead a morally upright life and, to the extent possible, avoid sin. Apart from this, they were allowed to engage in worldly activities. In the other category were those who had dedicated themselves fully to the spiritual path. As such, they were not allowed to go to the market place to make money. They were to have complete trust in God and pray to Him for all their spiritual and material needs, spending all their time in worship and in the activities of the order. Their life was the gift of God, so they had to devote their lives to the service of God. This was possible only by severing all relationships with everything but God.

It is essential that one's attention should not be unnecessarily distracted by irrelevant and trivial affairs. It is only when one's thoughts are centred on God, that one is properly focused: all other thoughts are then automatically marginalized, for one's mind cannot focus on two things at one and the same time. It is only by concentrating on God and God alone that the objective of establishing contact with Him may be achieved. Ultimately, it is the love of God that drives away all other thoughts.

Shaykh Nasiruddin believed that a Sufi must lead a very simple life, for a life of comfort was an obstacle to realizing God. He was to keep his eating, sleeping and talking to the barest minimum, and try to stay away from people, because they would not allow him to concentrate on his objective, and concentration was a must for any degree of spiritual gain. Time was of the utmost importance and once lost, could never be recovered. Therefore, the Sufi's time had to be spent above all in learning the meaning of the Qur'an and in contemplation.¹⁴ He who prayed and meditated in the

¹⁴ Khairul Majalis, p. 109

solitude of the early morning would be the one to experience the divine light in his soul.

The Chishtis laid the greatest of emphasis on the breathing control practiced during meditation. They believed that controlling the breath prevented the thought processes from being diverted. This also ensured that the *salik's* (disciple) time was fully utilized.

With every inhaling and exhaling of the breath, certain phrases from the Qur'an were recited and God's name was invoked. Once the Sufis were able to control their breathing through practice, they could rest assured that their time would not be wasted. Concentration exercises were given great importance in almost every order. These methods of breath control were and still are commonly used by yogis during meditation.

Shaykh Nasiruddin did not think that being in government service was an obstacle to contemplation and meditation. He also made it clear that Sufism had nothing to do with externals like wearing some special type of clothing or a particular kind of cap. To him, Sufism concerned itself with the training of the mind. It disciplined one's inner self. When the mind was fully trained to concentrate on God, no engagement could distract the Sufi's attention. Once the mind was properly attuned, nothing could come in the way of God's remembrance. One could be engaged physically in worldly affairs, but mentally one would be near God. However, it was understood that this worldly engagement should be purely for the purpose of securing the necessities of life and not aimed at acquiring comforts and luxuries, for there was no end to greed. One would not be satisfied with worldly acquisitions till one's dying day. Thus the Sufi, or spiritual way to make a living was to earn according to one's need, and not according to one's greed.

Later History of the Chishti Silsila

It is usually accepted that the history of the Chishti order in India can be divided into four distinct phases.¹⁵ These are as follows: 1. Era of the Great Shaykhs (approximately 1200 to 1356); 2. Era of the provincial *khanqah* (14th and 15th centuries); 3. Rise of the Sabiriyya branch (15th century onwards); 4. Revival of the Nizamiyya branch (18th century onwards).

The first phase encompasses the lives and activities of the saints who established their *khanqah* in Rajasthan, Punjab and what today comprises Uttar Pradesh. These, in chronological order, were: Muinuddin Chishti of Ajmer, Hamiduddin Suvali of Nagaur, Qutbuddin Bakhtiar Kaki of Delhi, Fariduddin Ganj-i-Shakar of Pakpattan, Nizamuddin Auliya of Delhi, Nasiruddin Chiragh-i Dilli and other *khalifas* of Nizamuddin Auliya: Maulana Muwayyid ud din, Shams ud-Din Yahya, Qadi Muhyiuddin Kashani, Ala'-ud-din Nili, Fakhruddin Zarradi, and Shihab-ud-din Imam. The Chishti *silsila* established by Muinuddin Chishti reached its peak during the lifetime of Nizamuddin Auliya. The *khalifat* of Nasiruddin Chiragh-i-Dilli ended the era of the great shaykhs, as none of the *khalifas* of Nizamuddin Auliya in Delhi, including Nasiruddin Chiragh himself, could match the spirituality, personal appeal, and fame of their Shaykh. Nasiruddin did not find any of his disciples worthy of being entrusted with the relics bequeathed to him by Nizamuddin Auliya, choosing rather to have them buried with him. His death marks the end of the centralized organization of the Chishti order and the emergence of provincial centres.

It was the disciples of Nizamuddin Auliya who carried the Chishti *silsila* to other parts of India. It was taken to Bengal by Siraj-ud-din, to the Deccan by Burhan-ud-din Gharib (Burhanpur), to Gujarat by Sayyid Hasan, Shaykh

¹⁵For this see Nizami, K.A. Chishtiyya, in EI, Leiden,

Husamuddin Multani and Shaykh Barak Allah, and to Malwa by Shaykh Wajih-ud-din Yusuf, Shaykh Kamal-ud-din and Maulana Mughith-ud-din. Each of the disciples perpetuated the line through his own disciples, who carried the Chishti thought and practices to yet other places.

Shaykh Siraj-ud-din Usman, known also as Akhi Siraj, who settled in Bengal, had a very able disciple, Shaykh Alauddin bin Asad, who in his turn had two disciples – Sayyid Nur *Qutub-i 'Alam* and Sayyid Ashraf Jahangir Simnani – who popularized the Chishti *silsila* in Bengal, Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh. Sayyid Nur was a contemporary of Sultan Ibrahim Sharqi of Jaunpur (1402-1440) and wielded great influence over him, even persuading him to invade Bengal. His disciples played an indirect role in fomenting a religious movement, which later on flowered as Bhakti.

Burhan-ud-din Gharib, who settled in Daulatabad during the reign of Muhammad bin Tughlaq, propagated the Chishti movement in the Deccan. He was succeeded by his very able *khalifah*, Shaykh Zain-ud-din, who became the spiritual mentor to 'Alauddin Hasan Shah (1347-1359), the founder of the Bahamani kingdom, as well as to his successors. On his suggestion, Sultan Nasir Khan Faruqi (1399-1437) built the city of Burhanpur, the capital of the Khandesh dynasty (1382-1601) and named it after Zain-ud-din's *pir*, (spiritual mentor) Burhan-ud-din Gharib. The sultan built yet another town and named it Zainabad after the Shaykh.

A *khalifah* of Nasiruddin Chiragh, Sayyed Muhammad ibn Yusuf al Husayni, popularly known as Khwajah Banda Nawaz or Gesu Daraz (d.1422), was the most famous Sufi in the Deccan. He was very energetic and worked in a number of different places. He started his activities in Delhi, but at that time the environment was not favourable, so he moved to Gujarat and from there on to the Deccan. In his later years he shifted to Gulbarga and

set up a Chishti centre there. He was a prolific writer who knew many languages, including Sanskrit, and through him the *silsila* spread in the Deccan and Gujarat.

Two of Qutbuddin Bakhtiar Kaki's lesser known disciples, Shaykh Mahmud and Shaykh Hamid-ud-din, introduced the *silsila* into Gujarat. Later on three disciples of Nizamuddin Auliya - Sayyid Hasan, Shaykh Husamuddin Multani and Shaykh Barak Allah - went there. But it was Allama Kamaluddin, a nephew and a *khalifah* of Shaykh Nasiruddin Chiragh, who effectively organized the order in Gujarat.

In Malwa, the order spread through the agency of three disciples of Nizamuddin Auliya—Shaykh Wajih-ud-din Yusuf settled in Chanderi while Shaykh Kamaluddin and Maulana Mughith settled in Mandu.

Thus, after Shaykh Nasiruddin's death, Delhi no longer remained the centre of the spiritual empire of the Chishti Sufis. Rather, a number of provincial centres came into existence with none playing the predominant role. That is why this phase in the history of the Chishti order is conveniently labeled as the era of the provincial *khanqah*. Each provincial branch of the order pursued its own activities and made its own history.

In the long run, the most important of these was the Sabriyyah branch, founded by Ala al-Din Ali ibn Ahmad Sabir (d. 1291), a *khalifah* of Baba Farid. He lived and was buried at Kalyar in U.P., in which area a number of centres were established by his successors. Ahmad Abdul Haq (d. 1434) of Rudawli and Shaykh Abdul Quddus Gangohi (d. 1537) were the early, distinguished Sufis of this order. Shaykh Muhibbullah Sadrupuri (d. 1648) of Allahabad was a great religious scholar and an advocate of Ibn 'Arabi's *wahdat ul wajud*.

The members of the Sabiriyya branch played a great role in the Islamic revival of the 19th and 20th centuries. Among them were Muhammad Qasim Nanawtawi (d. 1878), the founder of the *madrasa* of Deoband; Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi; Rashid Ahmad Gangohi (d. 1905); Ahmad Hasan Muhaddith Amrohawi (d. 1911; and the disciples of Rashid Ahmad Gangohi: Mahmud Hasan, *Shaykh al Hind* (d. 1920) and Husayn Ahmad Madani (d. 1957), who contributed to the evolution of the concept of 'composite culture', a concept that is paramount to understanding Muslim religious and social life in the subcontinent.

The activities associated with the rise of the Sabriyyah branch form the third phase of Chishti history.

The revival of the Nizamiyya branch in the 18th century falls into the fourth phase. The most notable Chishti Sufi of the Nizami branch was Shah Kalimullah Jahanabadi (d. 1729). His dynamic spiritual leadership enthused the order with a new spirit. His successors, the most prominent of whom was Shah Nizamuddin (d.1729), were active till the eighteenth century and were successful in maintaining the spiritual life of Delhi. Finally, the centre of activity bifurcated and new centres came to be established in the Punjab, Bareilly and Rajasthan.

At present, there are a great number of Chishti centres in the Indian subcontinent, which are actively engaged in disseminating the teachings of the Chishti order and managing the Chishti shrines.

The Jamaat Khana – a Centre of Peace and Spirituality

One of the salient features of the Chishti order was the fact that its members mixed freely with the common man. They did not retire to desolate spots in the wilderness or into high, unreachable mountains, thinking

only of their own spiritual gain, but rather, like Gautam Buddha, decided to convey the truth to as many people as possible. They even provided their disciples with board and lodging in modest dwellings with mud walls and thatched roofs called *jamaat khanas*, which had quiet, separate spaces set apart for meditation.

The *jamaat khanas* gradually became centres of social and spiritual life. The Shaykh and his family also lived in a part of the building and ate along with the disciples. Those who were associated with this spiritual centre did not go out into the world to make money. They lived on *futuh*, that is, voluntary contributions of visitors and the local population. The Chishti saints, like Muinuddin Chishti, Baba Farid, Bakhtiar Kaki and Nizamuddin Auliya, were very strict about not keeping gifts for the next day. Whatever was left after all basic needs were met was distributed to the poor and the needy, for the mentality of storing material things demonstrated distrust in God's bounty. To be a true believer in God, one had to have complete trust in God, as only then would one be held as deserving of God's blessings.

Principles Governing the Chishti Spiritual Life

“Do as you would be done by” was the single most important principle regulating the social life of the Chishtis in the *jamaat khana*. Chishtis were not opposed to family life, and since family life necessarily demanded some worldly activities, they were allowed to procure worldly things to serve their needs. But any inclination to store worldly things was opposed. For instance, the Chishti Sufis were not allowed to keep spare garments.

Although Shaykh Nizamuddin did not marry, and many prophets mentioned in the Qur'an, like Yahya and Jesus, did not marry either, the Chishtis did not preach celibacy. In fact, the founder of the order in India,

Khwaja Muinuddin, did marry, albeit at an advanced age, for marrying was also a tradition established by the Prophet. Leading a celibate life, of course, was not a sin, for had it been so, no prophet (for prophets are free of sin) would have remained celibate. What was sinful was to transgress the bounds set by God. Those who were not sure of their ability to lead chaste and pious lives were cautioned against opting for celibacy.

Shaykh Nizamuddin was not against leading a married life, but he felt that one who desired to be totally involved in divine contemplation had no need to marry, for being lost in divine contemplation provided a guarantee of protection from committing a sin. But if a Sufi failed to attain such a degree of absorption as would leave no room for sexual desire, then he was advised to opt for married life. Shaykh Nizamuddin felt that full concentration was required for complete absorption in God, and that any involvement in worldly matters was an obstacle to the attainment of this higher state of realization.

Laymen who could not dedicate their entire time to this spiritual life were allowed to pursue their worldly activities, the only stipulation being that they should do so by honest means. They were even allowed to hold government posts, as in the case of such distinguished disciples as Amir Khusro and Amir Hasan Sijzi. Everything was seen in terms of its outcome. If an occupation was dedicated to serving mankind, one had full permission to engage in it, but if it led to cruelty, greed and other such moral evils, one was debarred from taking it up.

Chishti Rituals

A fair knowledge of the *shariah* was the minimum qualification for the initiation of the disciples into the order. The first rite to be performed was

that of *tawba* (repentance). *Tawba* was the first step towards a new spiritual life, for it redeemed one of a past sinful life. Furthermore, if repentance came from a sincere heart, it served as a safeguard against future sins. Thus *tawba* brought about a complete revolution in one's life. Shaykh Nizamuddin once observed that *tawba* was of two kinds — of the present and of the future. The *tawba* of the present meant that a man felt guilty about past sins and sincerely regretted them and the *tawba* of the future required him to be fully determined never to commit those sins again, that is, to refrain from further wrongdoing.

God assures us that no matter what our sins have been, if we truly repent and seek His forgiveness, and take steps to put right our wrongs, He will forgive us.

But the true *tawba* according to the Chishtis was not a mere repetition of words. Rather it involved offering compensation to those who were wronged. For instance, if someone stole money from another, not only had he to repay the amount, but he also had to exert himself to placate the person who was robbed. If someone abused another, it was necessary for the abuser to approach the abused and offer him his sincere apologies. Thus *tawba* aimed at revolutionizing the whole life of an individual.

'*Dhikr*' means to remember God. One must remember God at all times and in all situations. When a person reaches the stage of perpetual remembrance, it is an indication that he has found God, with all His attributes. The Sufi *dhikr* is a spiritual method of attaining concentration. It is a technique whereby God's name is recited in a rhythmical way, the aim being to feel the divine presence in one's inner being. In the process, one of God's 99 names is generally invoked while controlling the respiration.

The Chishtis generally performed *dhikr-i-jali*, which is a form of *dhikr* recited aloud. Sometimes different syllables of the *kalima* (the Muslim profession of faith), and sometimes one of the names of God were recited. It was felt that by invoking God's name, one could establish communion with Him. By reciting God's name continuously, the disciple's whole being was absorbed by the thought of God.

The Chishtis developed the technique of *pas-i-anfas* (controlled breathing) that, according to Shaykh Nasruddin, was the essence of the Sufi discipline. This was practiced during meditation. The Sufis maintained that when breathing was controlled, thoughts were not diffused, and time was properly utilized. The development of this technique showed the influence of the yogis, who also breathed in a measured way while engaged in spiritual practices.

Sama' was yet another spiritual exercise practiced by the Chishtis. *Sama'* literally meant a "hearing" or "audition". In the context of *tasawwuf*, it meant the use of music as an aid to contemplation, which in turn was aimed at inducing ecstasy. Thus *sama'* came to denote the acts of listening to music, singing, chanting and measured recitation for the purpose of inducing religious emotions and ecstasy. The Chishtis in particular and the Sufis in general were criticized by the *ulama* for this practice, but they were not prepared to abandon it.

The Qadri Order

The Qadri Order is named after Shaykh Abdul Qadir Jilani (1077-1166), who figures prominently in Islamic spiritual history. For the first fifty years after the Shaykh's death, there was no formal organization to speak of. However, the Shaykh's teachings strongly influenced the thinking and conduct of a considerable number of Muslims during his lifetime. Later on, his disciples and followers perpetuated his teachings and saw to their dissemination. The Shaykh eventually came to be regarded as a great saint endowed with miraculous powers, and an embodiment of perfection.

Shaykh Abdul Qadir had a highly persuasive way of encouraging people to distance themselves from an obsession with material things and turn instead to matters of the spirit. Having awakened the spiritual side of their nature, he dedicated himself to instilling in them a profound reverence for moral and spiritual values. His religiosity and earnestness made a great impression on men who flocked to his side. He asked his followers to maintain the same strict standard of adherence to all the ramifications of Islamic Law, or *shariah*, as he did himself, for he looked upon the *shariah* as the mainspring of all spiritual progress. Insistence upon this point not only forged a bond between the jurists and the mystics (Sufis), but also ensured that there would be a just equilibrium between the varying interpretations of the letter and the spirit of the Qur'an.

In his works and sermons, Abdul Qadir Jilani makes frequent mention of Imam Ahmad ibn Hambal (d. 855), and on many issues of religious

importance, his stance was certainly influenced by his connection with the Hambali School of Islamic jurisprudence. In fact, he made *fiqh* (jurisprudence) and *tasawwuf* (mysticism) complementary to each other, thus bringing jurists and mystics together. In his elaborations on mysticism, he was always careful to keep all legal facets in view and, conversely, in explaining the principles of the law, he emphasized their spiritual implications.

Like most Islamic reformers of the Middle Ages, Shaykh Abdul Qadir believed that his mission was inspired by God and that it was at His Will that he led people along the path of spirituality. This conviction not only gave profundity to his mission, but also reinforced his endeavors with a sense of divine inspiration. He looked upon himself as God's special envoy charged with the ethical and spiritual revitalization of society. He regarded "showing people the way to God" not only as the starting point of all mystic striving but as an inheritance of the prophetic mission which it was the duty of all Muslims to perpetuate, regardless of circumstances. He addressed the problem of inculcating spirituality as a matter of both knowledge and faith. This is evident from *al-Fath al-rabbani* (The Revelations of the Divine), a transcription of the sermons he preached in the *madrasa* (college) and the *ribat* (hospice).

The Reform of Islamic Society

Abdul Qadir's mystic strivings were designed to meet the challenges of the era in which he lived. The decline of Muslim political power disturbed the social structure, which subsequently led to the lowering of Muslim morals. Spiritual life was eclipsed by material obsession. In this milieu, Shaykh Abdul Qadir's movement for spiritual uplift proved so effective that a number of

Sufis adopted Qadri mystic ideals and took it upon themselves to disseminate them. This led to the formation of the *silsila* or the chain of a spiritual order, whose aim was a large-scale regeneration of the spiritual fabric of society. At first the Qadri teachings were limited to Baghdad and its vicinity, but subsequently their influence was also felt in Arabia, Morocco, Egypt, Turkestan, and India, where people entered the fold in large numbers. However, the social environment and religious background of these regions being quite diverse in nature, the order had to solve a number of problems relating to local conditions.

As the Qadri Order did not take its final shape during the Shaykh's lifetime, many of the spiritual exercises and litanies were standardized later and did not originate from the Shaykh's own teachings. Nevertheless, it was precisely these spiritual exercises that were found to be the most attractive to the later followers. Persian commentaries and translations of his works certainly appeared in India and other countries, but the spiritual standards set by the Shaykh and the doctrines preached by him were so lofty that they could not be understood and scrupulously followed by ordinary men and women. Moreover, the Shaykh's books, being in Arabic, had a limited impact on people of non-Arab regions. As a result, subsequent generations set a greater store by the litanies of the Qadri order than the actual teachings of the Shaykh.

The Organization and Dissemination of the Order

The Shaykh was both a mystic guide and a college teacher, but after him these two functions were split and divided between his two sons. While one son, Abd al Wahhab (1151-1196), took over the *madrasa*, the other son, Abdul Razzaq (1134-1206), who was also a known ascetic, dedicated himself

to running the *ribat*. Both institutions were obliterated during the sack of Baghdad in 1258. As a matter of fact, several members of the family, as well as followers staying nearby, perished during the invasion. Those who escaped with their life migrated to other regions. The few family members who stayed behind in Baghdad formed the “moral centre” of the order, while those who settled in other places began reduplicating the order in new settings.

It is against the background of the conquest of Baghdad by Hulagu in 1258, the fall of Granada in 1492, and the rise of the Ottoman Empire in 1517 — the three major developments in the Islamic world — that the Qadri Order evolved in Africa, Central Asia, and Turkestan. Hulagu’s sack of Baghdad did away with the Abbasid Empire and erased its capital from the cultural map of the world. This led to the emergence of regional centres of power and the establishment of regional dynasties. The fall of Granada closed the chapter of the Muslim history of Spain, forcing the scholars of Andalusia to disperse in other Muslim lands, mostly North Africa and the Middle East. The effective establishment of the Ottomans in Anatolia, the Safavids in Iran and the Mughals in India gave impetus to new religious developments.

The spiritual successors of Shaykh Abdul Qadir Jilani carried his teachings to distant lands. Ali ibn Haddad is credited with spreading Qadri thought and practice in Yemen and Muhammad al-Bata’ini of Baalbek in Syria. Muhammad Abdus Samad furthered the interests of the order in Egypt. Indeed, there was a time when the entire Nile Valley was home to a large network of Qadri centres, with Cairo as an important hub of Qadri activity. Ismail Rumi (d.1631) introduced the order into Asia Minor and Istanbul. He founded some forty *takiyahs* (the Turkish name for Sufi centres) in that

region and a *khanqah* (the Persian name for Sufi hospice), known as *Qadri-khanqah* or 'The Hospice of the Qadris'. In Arabia *zawiyahs* (the Arabic name for Sufi centre) were set up at Jedda, Madinah, and Makkah. In Africa, there were numerous Qadri *zawiyahs* at Khartum, Sokoto, and Tripoli. Qadri missionary activity was greatly in evidence among the Berbers. The Qadri *tariqa* in India was established by Sayyid Muhammad Makhdum Gilani (d.1517), known also as Muhammad Ghawth, who founded a *khanqah* in Uch, which flourished under Shaykh Dawud Kirmani (d.1574), Miyan Mir (d.1635) and Mulla Shah Badakshani (d.1661). There were Qadriyya establishments in Sindh, Punjab, Gujarat, Deccan, and Kashmir as well.

The Life of the Founder

Shaykh Abdul Qadir (1078-1166) was born in the village of Nif, in the district of Jilan in northern Iran, south of the Caspian Sea. He was descended from Imam Hasan, the Prophet's grandson. Orphaned early, he was looked after by his maternal grandfather, Sayyid 'Abdullah Suma'i, who was a pious and saintly person. In 1095, when he was eighteen, he left Jilan for Baghdad, which was then the hub of unparalleled intellectual activity and where the reputed Nizamiyyah College, a seminary founded in 1065, was at its zenith. However, he chose not to study in this institution and pursued his studies with other teachers of Baghdad.

Right from his early childhood, his truthful character had a great impact upon anyone who chanced to meet him. There is a story about his journey from his native place to Baghdad which illustrates this special virtue. When he was about to leave, his mother gave him forty gold coins —his share in the patrimony, which she concealed by stitching them into his cloak. As parting advice to her son, she told him always to be truthful and honest; Abdul Qadir promised never to tell a lie.

On the way, the caravan he was travelling with was held up by some bandits. One of them asked Abdul Qadir if he had anything of value with him. He replied that he had forty gold coins. The robber did not believe him and moved on to another victim. One after another the bandits came and questioned him and he gave them all the same answer. Unbelieving, the bandit leader finally asked him to show him where the money was. Abdul Qadir produced his cloak and the money was found concealed in its lining. Surprised and puzzled at such truthfulness, the bandit asked him why he had owned up to the possession of something of value, when he could easily have denied it, thus saving his money. Abdul Qadir replied that he had made a promise of truthfulness to his mother, regardless of the circumstances. This statement gave the bandit leader a jolt. There and then he fell at his feet and, repenting of his wrongdoing, he said: "You keep the promise you made to your mother, while we forget the promise that we made to our Creator." The miscreants returned all their ill-gotten gains to their victims with a feeling of true remorse.

In Baghdad, Abdul Qadir felt drawn to the Hambalite school of Islamic law, and studied it with great perseverance, in spite of constantly finding himself in great financial difficulties. Poverty and hunger did nothing to dilute his eagerness for knowledge. He made a careful study of the *hadith* (sayings of the Prophet), jurisprudence and literature. His spiritual training was given to him by Shaykh Abul Khayr Hammad ibn Muslim al-Dabbas (d. 1131), an unlettered saint who was famous for his spiritual excellence. By then Abdul Qadir had already acquired a reputation as a jurist, but the Sufis were not well disposed to his becoming one of them. However, since mysticism was looked upon favourably by some of the Hambalite jurists of

the period, this antagonism soon dissipated. It is reported that Abdul-Qadir was initiated into the mystic discipline by his teacher of jurisprudence, Qadi Abu Said Mubarak al-Mukharrimi (d. 1129), head of a school of Hambalite law in Baghdad, who bestowed upon him the Sufi robe.

Once the Shaykh's academic and spiritual training in Baghdad was over, he withdrew from the world. It is said that he spent the next twenty-five years as a wandering dervish, the last eleven years in total seclusion in ruins located some distance from Baghdad. Interestingly, Henri Bergson has likened the seclusion of a mystic to "the repose of a locomotive standing in a station under steam pressure." Not surprisingly, when in 1127 Abdul Qadir re-emerged from his retreat, he was filled with a feeling of purpose and began to address the public with great energy and keenness. He did so on the advice — which reinforced his own spiritual leanings — of Khwajah Yusuf Hamadani (d.1140). This renewed commitment coincided with his succeeding his mentor, Mukharrimi, as the head of a seminary, or *madrasa*, in Baghdad, where he began to impart his knowledge to others.

Shaykh Abdul Qadir figures in the works of all of his contemporaries as well as later writers as an extremely powerful preacher. Many mystics made an impact upon the people by giving them their undivided attention and personal care, but the Shaykh chose a different route altogether. He took to addressing vast crowds, thereby bringing about a revolution in their lives. Indeed, his feats had no parallel in Islamic history.

With this recourse to mass appeal, Islamic mysticism entered a new stage, where the mystic teachers of *da'irahs* (small mystic centres of like-minded persons) and *zawiyahs* (centres for mystics to live and pray in) emerged from their retreats and began to address huge gatherings, communicating their message of spiritual and moral enlightenment. Shattanawfi (d. 1314)

writes in his biography that sometimes Abdul Qadir's sermons were attended by as many as seventy thousand people.¹ This may be somewhat of an exaggeration, but there is no doubt that the sermons were extremely popular. The *madrasa* building soon proved too small to accommodate the eager public, so he shifted his lectures to an Idgah. It is said that he used to deliver sermons thrice a week – at the Idgah on Friday mornings, at the *madrasa* on Tuesday nights, and at the hospice on Wednesday mornings. Different kinds of people came to him to learn different things. There were Sufis as well as scholars of jurisprudence, men of wealth as well as men of letters. Some came from lands as far off as Mesopotamia, Persia, and Egypt. Occasionally Jews and Christians attended his meetings and were often so inspired by his eloquence that they entered the fold of Islam on the spot. Four hundred scribes recorded his every utterance.² Of the impact made by him as a preacher, Abul Faraj al-Jawzi, a contemporary writer, says that as a result of his urgings, people eschewed their evil ways and began to set their feet upon the straight and narrow path of the good and the right. What was even more extraordinary was that members of his congregations sometimes breathed their last as a result of the overwhelming emotion they experienced as they listened to his powerful words.

Entrusted with the running of a large *madrasa* by his teacher, Qadi Abu Said Mubarak al-Mukharrimi, the Shaykh paid such attention to its constant improvement that its neighbourhood came to have almost the status of a *madrasa* town. The Shaykh himself used to teach several subjects of the religious sciences. With both the *madrasa* and the *ribat* at his disposal, the Shaykh had every opportunity he needed to propagate his teachings. For a period of forty years (1127-1165), he delivered sermons and gave instruction

¹ Bahajat al-asrar, p.. 92

² *ibid.*, p.. 95

in religious sciences, and for thirty-five years he also acted as *mufti*, giving his legal opinion on a variety of issues.³ He thus blended a profound knowledge of Islamic law with a mystical fervour for spiritual life. Though apparently committed ideologically to the Hambalite School, he maintained a certain broadness of approach, for according to a report, he acted as the guardian of Imam Abu Hanifah's tomb.

During his lifetime, there were certain misgivings about his status as a Sufi teacher. But this was due to a misunderstanding of his endeavours. Most certainly, the Shaykh looked after a community centre dedicated to the practice of mystic spirituality, but since the *silsila* was organized formally only at a later period, his mystic strivings were not given an organizational framework during his lifetime. For a deep and insightful presentation of Sufi idealism, one must consult his *Ghunyat al-Talibin* ('That Which is Sufficient for Seekers'), the text most studied by latter day Qadris.

One of his greatest achievements was the extensive revitalization of Muslim spiritual culture. Some of the founders of other mystic orders—like Khwajah Muinuddin Chishti and Shaykh Najibuddin Suhrawardi—derived great benefit from directly associating with him, coming under the sway of his mystic ideas. Ibn 'Arabi considered him his mentor and refers to him often in his writings, going even to the extent of citing him as an example of the perfect *khalifah* who showed himself to the world and practiced worldly sovereignty, and whose excellence was independent of the revelation of the Prophet Muhammad.⁴

³ *ibid.* p. 95

⁴ Ibn 'Arabi, *Fusus al Hikam*, para 16

The Works of Abdul Qadir

TWENTY-FOUR TITLES ARE ascribed to Shaykh Abdul Qadir, of which the most important are:

(1) *al-Ghunyah li-talibi tariq al-haqq* ('That Which Is Sufficient to the Seekers of the Path of Truth'), generally known as *Ghunyat al-talibin*, an exhaustive work on the obligations enjoined by Islam and the Islamic way of life;

(2) *al-Fath al-rabbani* ('The Revelations of the Divine') a record of sixty-two sermons delivered by him during the years 1150-1152;

(3) *Fath al-ghayb* ('The Revelations of the Unseen') a record of seventy-eight sermons compiled by his son, Abdul Razzaq.

He wrote the *Ghunyat al-talibin*, a detailed account of his religious views, at the request of his followers and friends. It was translated into Persian by Abdul Hakim Sialkoti (d. 1657). Unlike the two other works, the *Futuh al-ghayb* and *al-Fath al-rabbani*, it is a comprehensive work dealing both with Islamic law and mystical thought. His sermons, however, are less than exhaustive, for his compilers were unable to record his every utterance, resulting in certain inevitable omissions. In the two collections of his sermons, the Shaykh emerges as being of an entirely other-worldly nature, but in the *Ghunyat* there is a greater equilibrium between spiritual and worldly obligations. His deliberations on faith, charity (*zakat*), fasting, and *hajj* (pilgrimage) are followed by an analysis of the propriety of behaviour to be observed in daily life. He also deals with the sects that he considered to have strayed from the true path, ending with an exposition of his mysticism. On the whole, the Shaykh set forth his ideas on religion and ethics in the context of faith, devotion to God, and interaction with his fellow men.

The sermons contained in *Futuh al-Ghayb* are loosely arranged according

to their subject matter but are undated. On the insistence of his spiritual mentor (*pir*), Shaykh Abdul Wahab Qadri of Makkah (d. 1607) and of Shah Abu'l-Ma'ali Qadri (d. 1615) of Lahore, Shaykh Abdul Haqq Muhaddith (1551-1642) of Delhi, also a Qadri, translated *Futuh al-Ghayb* into Persian and wrote a commentary to it, so that the Shaykh's views might be disseminated better.

Fath al-rabbani gives the substance of the forty sermons the Shaykh delivered in 1150. It represents a single year of the Shaykh's assemblies. Numerous commentaries and translations tried to fill up any gaps that make the text obscure. Many abridgements, critical revisals and commentaries of this as well as his other works have also appeared.

More than a hundred years after the saint's death, his biography, *Bahjat al-Asrar* ('The Splendour of Secrets'), was compiled by 'Ali ibn Yusuf al-Shattanawfi (d.1314).

The Teachings of the Shaykh

SHAYKH ABDUL QADIR'S spirituality was based on his personal realization of God. For him God was an all-encompassing persona, forever immanent in man's moral, intellectual, and aesthetic awareness. He was neither a deified legendary figure nor was He an abstract, rationalized concept of oneness. The Shaykh felt as if he were always in His Presence. From his sermons it was possible to judge the degree of his own understanding of God's Omnipresence. This consciousness of the Divine Omnipresence guided and motivated his waking life and raised it to a transcendental level. The Prophet's urging of people "to pray as if you see Him; and if you see Him not, then He sees you" was his most important maxim and he certainly practiced what he preached. He believed that this realization made each

individual's heart pure and thus attuned it to the realm of the Spirit⁵ without, however, losing sight of the separateness of the Creator and His creation. On the other hand, his analyses of *fana* ' (annihilation) and *baqa* ' (subsistence) erred on the side of caution, in that they carefully skirted the subject of pantheism, although many later Qadri saints, such as Miyan Mir (d. 1635) and Mulla Shah Badakhshani (d. 1661) of India were not so scrupulous in their approach.

Total devotion to God constituted the ideal life for the Shaykh. He considered that it was for this sole purpose that God created man-kind. The Qur'an says: "I have not created *jinn* and mankind except to worship Me." (51:56). A "God-conscious existence" gives man superior spirituality; it raises him above the worldly grind; it shows him how hollow are the supposed "joys of life"; it introduces him to spiritual tranquillity and makes it possible for him to have access to the true source of spiritual power. The more a man endeavours to "live for the Lord; the nearer he comes to realizing the divine purpose of life. One has to surrender his life, his will, and his material means to God if he aims at divine realization."⁶

Man is endowed with spiritual strength, however, only when he is at one with the Divine Purpose of Existence and leads his life in accordance with the Divine Will as revealed in the *sunnah* (sayings and actions of the Prophet). All those who meticulously follow the *sunnah* in all aspects of day-to-day living, in effect, submit themselves to the Divine Will.

The Shaykh believed that the world of the hereafter was veiled from our eyes by the present world. The greater the degree of involvement in this world and all its attractions, the more dense the veil (*hijab*) between man and the unknowable world of the afterlife.⁷

⁵ al Fath al rabbani, sermon XIII, p. 133

⁶ Ibid., sermon XXI, pp.122-125

⁷ Ibid., sermon XXI, p. 122

The seeker, after further spiritual enlightenment, must leave behind the ego and surrender all attachments to worldly, material things. Remaining embroiled in worldly matters de-sensitizes man spiritually and renders him incapable of responding to the word of God. On the question of detachment, the Shaykh went so far as to say that without distancing oneself entirely, both physically and mentally, from the surrounding world, one remained dormant as a spiritual being. Constant endeavour and an intelligent approach were essential for spiritual progress. He held that “the beginning of spiritual life was to transcend the natural urges, tread the path of law and then move onwards to one’s destiny and still onward to come back to the natural urges, but on condition of the preservation of the law.” So you should transcend your urges of nature in the matter of food and drink and dress and marital relations and place of residence and tendencies and habits, to honour the injunctions and prohibitions of law. You are to follow the Book of Allah and the practice of His Prophet, the blessings and peace of Allah be upon him, as Allah says: ‘And accept what the Prophet has brought to you and refrain from what he forbids you to do.’” (59:7)⁸

FOR THE GUIDANCE of those who wished to lead a pious life, the Shaykh laid down ten principles recorded in *Ghunyat*:⁹

(1) Refrain from speaking ill of those not present; (2) refrain from being unduly suspicious of others; (3) avoid gossip and malicious comments; (4) abstain from looking at anything which is prohibited; (5) always tell the truth; (6) always be grateful to God; (7) spend money on those who are deserving of help; (8) abstain from straining after worldly power and position; (9) be regular in saying the five daily prayers; (10) adhere to the *sunnah* of the Prophet and be cooperative towards Muslims.

⁸ Fath al Ghaib, sermon 60, tr. M. Aftabud din Ahmad, reprinted in India, Delhi, 1990, p.121

⁹ Ghunyat, pp. 275-276

The role of the spiritual mentor is underscored by the Shaykh in his explanation of his doctrine of spiritual advancement. In *Futuh al-ghayb* he compares the spiritual guide to “a wet nurse who feeds the baby.” However, in the same work he makes the point that the Shaykh is a necessity only in so far as his listeners are consumed by base instincts and desires, and are bent upon achieving unworthy ends. But once the lower cravings have been overcome, the Shaykh is no longer needed. This explanation makes it clear that, in the early stages of one’s spiritual pursuit, the guidance of a mentor is essential, but that if one’s later career is marked by due progress, one may proceed independently. Once the Shaykh has brought his disciple to the point of turning resolutely away from worldly allurements, he is no longer needed as a spiritual guide.

Shaykh Abdul Qadir urged his followers to desire for others what they desired for themselves, and to refrain from wishing for others what they did not wish for themselves.¹⁰ He quoted the following verse of the Qur’an: “Surely God loves the doers of good to others,” (3:133) advocating the principle that service to mankind is a worthy spiritual deed and that it is a major religious and spiritual duty to make every effort to bring about social welfare. When he equated the “service of mankind” with “the highest spiritual activity of man”, he greatly broadened the scope of such effort. He looked upon all people as “children of God on earth”¹¹ and considered that true religious dedication was to be found in giving assistance to the indigent. “Whoever fills his stomach while his neighbour starves is weak in his faith.”¹² His altruism reaches its zenith when he says that “he would like to close the

¹⁰ Fath al Rabanni, p. 107; compare with the teachings of the Chishtis, who advocated the same attitude

¹¹ Ibid., p. 19

¹² Ibid., p. 109

doors of hell and open those of paradise to all mankind.” It is the duty of those who wish to be pious and righteous, firstly, to refrain from acting oppressively towards others and, secondly, to carry out their obligations to them in a sympathetic manner.¹³ Quoting Aishah, the Prophet’s wife, he repeats a saying of the Prophet to the effect that human mistakes and wrongdoing can be categorized thus: (a) sins one commits against oneself—pardonable by God; (b) sins committed against God by entertaining polytheism—unforgivable by God; (c) acts of tyranny carried out against other human beings—God would not forgive even the most trifling of such acts.¹⁴

For him hypocrisy was no lesser a sin than polytheism. Hypocrites would bring down God’s wrath upon themselves. Even a scholar (*‘alim*) who did not live up to his knowledge was branded a hypocrite. In fact, the Shaykh advised his followers to shun those who did not make proper use of their knowledge. He is particularly vehement against those who are “like lambs in appearance but are really wolves in thought and action.”¹⁵

He advised his flock to live on what they earned by honest means and by their own efforts, and to share what they earned with others. But he advised them also neither to become completely dependent on those from whom they gained their livelihood, nor to be too reliant on the arts and crafts by which they earned their living. The Shaykh kept strictly away from rulers, holding them to be unjust and exploitative. He necessarily abhorred any dealings with temporal powers, seeing them to be counter to the true spirit of religion. Although the Abbasid caliphs anxiously sought his blessings, he resolutely discouraged any interaction with them. Sultan

¹³ Ghunyat, pp. 295-296

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 262-263

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 478-480

Sanjar reportedly offered the province of Sistan (in southern Persia) to defray the expenses of his *khanqah*, but he refused the offer, saying: “My face may turn black like the canopy of Sanjar, / If except poverty I desire anything from Sanjar’s country.”

Despite his critical view of rulers, he believed that a people deserved whatever rulers they had, for it was the outcome of their own character and the way they led their lives. He used to say: “As you are, so shall be your rulers.” He constantly advised the people to reform their own thinking and conduct, so that their rulers might also be virtuous.¹⁶

The Qadri order in India

The Qadri order was introduced into the Indian subcontinent in the 15th century. Its first centre was established in the Deccan. Later on and independently of it, another centre came to be established in Uch in Punjab.

The story goes that Shihabuddin Ahmad I (1422-1436), a Bahamani ruler of Gulbarga, impressed with the spiritual fame and miraculous powers of the descendants of Shaykh Abdul Qadr Jilani, sent his envoy to Kirman where Shah Nematullah Wali, a *khalifah* of the Shaykh, resided and the Sultan was initiated, from a distance, as his disciple. Later, the Sultan requested his mentor to send his son, Khalilullah to his court to act as his spiritual guide. The Shaykh did not want to part with his only son, so he sent instead his grandson, Mir Nurullah, the son of Khalilullah. The Sultan received him with great reverence and built a town in his honour, naming it Ni’amatabad. When Shaykh Nematullah died in 1431, Shah Khalilullah joined his son in the Deccan, bringing his other sons as well. The presence

¹⁶ Fath al Rabbani, p. 51

of Shah Nematullah's son and grandsons in the Bahamanid Sultanate considerably reduced the influence of the spiritual descendants of Gesu Daraz and the Chishti order in the Deccan, while enhancing that of the Qadri.

In the second half of the 15th century a Qadri *khanqah* was established in Uch near Multan, making Punjab the second Indian centre of the Qadri activities. The *khanqah* was founded by Shaykh Muhammad al Husaini al Jilani, known as Muhammad Ghawth (d. 1517), who was a direct descendant of Shaykh Abd al-Qadr through his son, Abd al Wahhab. Shaykh Muhammad al Husaini al Jilani, was succeeded by his son, Shaykh Abd al Qadri Sani, who in turn was succeeded for a brief period of time by his son, Abd ur Razzaq (d. 1535) and then his grandson, Shaykh Hamid (d.1571). Shaykh Hamid achieved great popularity amongst the masses. His two sons, Shaykh Abdul Qadir and Shaykh Musa, both had the ambition of becoming their father's *khalifas*. The matter reached the court of Akbar, who disliked Shaykh Abdul Qadir and favoured Shaykh Musa over him. Therefore, while the people of Uch considered Abdul Qadir to be his father's *khalifah*, the court of Akbar and the Sufis associated with it considered the *khalifah* to be Shaykh Musa. One of the greatest disciples of Shaykh Musa was Shaykh Abdul Haq Muhaddis Dihlawi.

Shaykh Hamid's most outstanding successor and disciple however was Shaykh Dawud. He was already a wandering dervish and an ascetic when he had a dream in which the Ghausul Azam (Abd al Qadir Jilani) instructed him to seek Shaykh Hamid as his mentor. He did so successfully and later on became known for his spiritual excellence and his devotions. Once or twice a year he would distribute all the gifts accumulated in his house, keeping only a pot and a mat for himself. On the birth and death anniversaries of

Ghausul Azam, some hundred thousand people would assemble near his Shergarh *khanqah* to share in these gifts.¹⁷ He was succeeded by his nephew and son-in-law, Shaykh Abul Ma'ali (d.1554), who was an accomplished poet, writing under the pen name of Ghurbati. Among his admirers was Shaykh Abdul Haqq Muhaddis Dihlawi. It was during a short stay in the *khanqah* of Shaykh Abul Ma'ali in Lahore that he completed the Persian translation of Abdul Qadir Jilani's, *Futuh al Ghayb*, and furnished it with a commentary, *Miftah-i Futuh* ('Key to *Futuh*').

Shaykh Abdul Haqq (1551-1642) was initiated into the Qadri order by his *pir*, Shaykh Musa, who was close to Akbar as well as his courtiers, Abul Fazl and Faizi, but he did not share his *pir's* liking for life at the imperial court. He soon left Agra and returned to Delhi. He stayed there for a while and then travelled to Makkah where he studied under Shaykh Abdul Wahhab Muttaqi al Qadri al Shazili, who taught him the importance of strengthening one's beliefs within the framework of the *shariah*, following this with an analysis of Sufi works dealing with the concept of *wahdat al wujud*. This advice seems to have been taken to heart, for all the writings of Abdul Haqq balance the requirements of the law with the practice of mysticism. The list of his spiritual friends and mentors include, amongst others, Shah Abul Ma'ali Qadri and Khwaja Baqi Billah, the Naqshbandi. He is also credited with writing a letter to his contemporary Ahmad Sirhindi the Mujaddid, his main opponent on the issue of *wahdat al wujud*.

His devotion to Abdul Qadir al Jilani was proverbial. His work, *Akhbarul Akhyar* ('Notes about the Pious'), relating to Indian Sufis, is prefaced by a long biography of the Shaykh. As already mentioned, he translated his work, *Futuh al Ghayb*, into Persian. He shared, to a large extent, the world view

¹⁷ Abu'l Fazl, Akbarnama, III, Calcutta, 1886, p. 802

of Ibn 'Arabi though he believed that some of his propositions were difficult for the uninitiated to understand. Nonetheless, he was a most ardent defender and exponent of Ibn 'Arabi's doctrine of *wahdat al wujud* and wrote commentaries on controversial passages in Ibn 'Arabi's work in order to convince the *ulama* of their true significance. However, he was also a great scholar of the *hadith*, and some consider his works on the *hadith* to be more valuable than anything else he might have written.

Besides the mysticism worked out from the theological position by the learned Sufis, there was yet another type of mystical sensitivity and devotional passion represented by Miyan Mir and others like him.

Miyan Mir, also known as Mir Muhammad, (1531-1635) was a contemporary of Abdul Haqq, but was not well educated like him and spoke only the local Sindi dialect. Miyan Mir's *pir*, Shaykh Khizr, was a Sufi mentioned in Dara Shikoh's *Sakinat ul Auliya* ('The Ship of Saints') as a passionate believer in poverty and asceticism. After receiving guidance from him, Miyan Mir went on to Lahore to seek knowledge from the Sufis living there. Soon his fame spread far and wide, forcing him to leave the town for a while. One of the myths surrounding him tells of an incident when he was sick and he had a dream in which Ghaus ul Azam appeared to him and cured him of his ailment.

His philosophy of life was based on trust in God, or *tawakkul*. It is said that he used to throw out water on a hot Lahore evening to ensure that none remained for the next day. He scorned Sufis like Shaykh Bahauddin Zakariyya, a Suhrawardi shaykh of great renown and the recipient of lavish gifts, expressing doubts about his spiritual achievements. He even criticized the Sufi custom of wearing a patched cloak, as it attracted unnecessary attention to the Sufis, who were then frequently brought offerings. He

himself wore ordinary clothes and believed that it was the *baya'*, or pledge, that bound the disciple to his mentor and to the Sufi order, and not the wearing of a *khirqā*.

Once, when Jahangir was passing through Lahore, he heard about Miyan Mir and requested him to grace his camp with his presence. Apparently, the Emperor was so impressed with his asceticism that he dared not present him with any gift except the skin of a white antelope to pray on.¹⁸

The most prominent of Miyan Mir's disciples was the celebrated *pir* of Prince Dara Shikoh, Shah Muhammad known as Mulla Shah (1584-1661). He was born in a small village in Badakhshan in Central Asia and was initially educated there. Later on he left for Balkh where he studied theology and Arabic. From there he moved to Srinagar in Kashmir, where he stayed for the next few years. Subsequently, while traveling in Hindustan, he heard of Miyan Mir and decided to become his disciple. He found in him the perfect *pir*. Miyan Mir was singularly proud of Mulla Shah and prophesied that the Qadri *silsila* would gain fame through him. He remained celibate throughout his life, never missing his obligatory prayers, even when sick, and was considered an unsurpassed master of *dhikr*, as well as a great adept of breath control, or *habs-i nafs*.

Dara Shikoh, the eldest son of Shah Jahan, was an ill-fated prince who lost his life and the throne at the hands of his youngest brother Aurangzeb, in 1659. His fame rests on his scholarly pursuits, his interest in comparative religion and fascination with spirituality. In this last quest, Mulla Shah became his *pir* as well as the *pir* of his sister Jahan Ara, teaching the highborn disciples the intricacies of *wahdat ul wujud* and initiating them into the practices of the Sufis.

¹⁸ quoted from Tuzuk-i Jahangiri after Rizvi, S.A.A., A History of Sufism in India, Delhi, 1992, vol. II, p. 106

A number of works written by the prince have the Sufis and Sufism as their subject: *Safinat ul Auliya* ('The Ship of Saints' – a biographical dictionary of the saints, both dead and living), *Sakinat ul Auliya* ('The Peace of the Saints' – an account of Miyan Mir, his saintly sister Bibi Jamal Khatun and the Miyan's disciples), *Risala-i Haqq-numa* ('The Treatise of the True Guide' – an exposition of Sufism), *Hasanat ul Arifin* ('The Beauty of the Gnostics' - a compilation of mystical utterances and sayings of the Sufis). He had also, with the assistance of Sanskrit pandits, translated about 50 Upanishads into Persian and compiled them in a text known as *Sirr-i Akbar* ('The Greatest Secret'). In his introduction to it, he claimed that the Upanishads represented the 'hidden books' mentioned in the Qur'an. He saw in them an explanation of the concept of *wahdat al wujud*. It was through Dara Shikoh's Persian Upanishads that these texts first became known in the West. His other important work is *Majma ul Bahrain* ('The Meeting Place of Two Oceans') known in Sanskrit as *Samudara Sangam*, in which he expressed his discovery of significant parallels between Hinduism and Islam. He said that there were no fundamental differences between the two religions, making detailed comparisons of related concepts. He also composed verses with mystical themes in Persian and Hindi.

Practices of the Qadri Order

Some of the rituals and litanies of the Qadri Order, which came into evidence particularly after it spread throughout Turkey, Egypt, India, and Africa, have been attributed to Shaykh Abdul Qadir, while others are clearly subsequent additions.

Particular features of the order in different regions have, at times, been represented symbolically. The Turkish Qadris adopted as their symbol

a green rose. When a novitiate enters the order, the Qadri Shaykh attaches to his felt cap a rose with eighteen sections, with Solomon's Seal in the centre. This cap is called *Taj* (crown), and is greatly prized in mystic circles. In Egypt the Qadris wear white turbans and carry white banners.

THE MOST IMPORTANT of the spiritual practices of the Qadri order is *dhikr*, or the recitation of the name of God. The actual performance of *dhikr* is classified into four types according to the degrees of intensity and emphasis. There are *dhikr* described as 'dhikr with one stroke', 'dhikr with two strokes', 'dhikr with three strokes', and 'dhikr with four strokes', the term 'stroke' being used in the metaphorical rather than the literal sense. 'Dhikr with one stroke' means firmly repeating the name of *Allah* with a long drawn-out breath, as if from high above, with all the force of heart and throat, and then returning to normal breathing. A long time must be spent on repeating this continuously. 'Dhikr with two strokes' means sitting, as for prayer, and invoking the Name of Allah, first from the right side of the breast and then from the heart. This is done forcefully and repeatedly without gaps. This is considered to facilitate concentration of the heart and to ward off worry and distraction. 'Dhikr with three strokes' is performed sitting cross-legged and repeating the Name of Allah first at the right side, then at the left, and the third time from the heart. The third stroke has to be much more intense and also more protracted. 'Dhikr with four strokes' is also performed sitting cross-legged and is done by saying aloud the name of *Allah* first on the right side, then on the left, the third time toward the heart, and the fourth time in front of the breast. The last stroke is expected to be stronger and carried on for a longer period.

After *dhikr* the Qadris recommend *pas-i-anfas*, which means controlling one's breathing so as to cause the name of *Allah* to circulate in the body in

the process of inhaling and exhaling. Next is the *muraqabah*, or contemplation. For this one has to focus entirely on some verse of the Qur'an or a Divine Attribute and then become completely absorbed in contemplating it.

It is difficult to explain some of the rituals in which the later followers of the Shaykh engage, as they seem to be influenced by local customs. For example, the followers of the Qadri Order in North Africa, who are called *Gilanis*, practice the ritual of *khalwah* which actually refers to spiritual retreat, in their own particular way. Certain symbolic items like reeds are fixed between piles of stones, which are then called the *khalwah*. The local women attach strips of cloth to the reeds and burn oil placed in little earthen vessels in order to remove the 'bad eye'. Both men and women visit this type of *khalwah* and pray for the fulfillment of their wishes.

In Morocco certain Qadris vocalize their remembrance of God (*dhikr*) with a musical accompaniment. In Tangier, when the Jilalah make vows, they place white cocks in the *zawiyah* (centre for mystics). These are called *muharrar* and their lives are spared.

On the 11th of the month of *Rabi'ath sani*, those who are connected with the Qadri order celebrate the birth and the death anniversary of Abdul Qadir Jilani, very often by cooking special food and distributing it among the followers and neighbours. In Sindi folk tradition, the whole month is often called *yarhin*, 'eleven', because it is sanctified by this memorial day. In Ludhiana 'his toothpick is said to have taken root' and to have grown into a tree near which an annual fair is held.¹⁹

An almost unavoidable outcome of such practices was the raising of

¹⁹ T.W.Arnold, Saints, Muhammadan, in India, in Encyclopedia of Religions, ed. Hastings, Vol. XI, pp. 68-73

Abdul Qadir Jilani to the level of a deity by the extreme devotees. He himself is supposed to have observed: “All the saints are under my feet.” If such a sentiment were actually voiced by the Shaykh, it could only relate to his elevated spiritual state — without there being any suggestion of his prominence in a saintly hierarchy, as claimed by his later admirers. Even Shaykh Abdul Haqq Muhaddith of Delhi, an otherwise very careful scholar of great insight, depicts the Shaykh in terms stemming from these far-fetched tales of the saints. The greatness of Shaykh Abdul Qadir lay not in his miracles, but in his “God-conscious” way of life and his total devotion to the overarching ideal of Islamic mysticism: to realize God, to show people the way to God, and to bring happiness to troubled hearts and distracted souls.

The Suhrawardi Order

The establishment of the Order

The Suhrawardi order traces its spiritual origins to Shaykh Abu Najib Suhrawardi (1097-1168) though it was his nephew and disciple Shaykh Shihabuddin Suhrawardi (1145-1234), who laid the true foundations of the order. The order was brought to the Indian subcontinent by his able disciples, Shaykh Bahauddin Zakariyya, who founded a *khanqah* (Hospice) in Multan, Shaykh Jalal'uddin Tabrizi, who settled in Bengal, and Qadi Hamiduddin Nagauri who settled in Delhi. The Suhrawardi *silsila* went on to become one of the most popular on the subcontinent, next only to the Chishtiyya, though the continuous history of the *silsila* can be traced only through the *khalifas* of Shaykh Bahauddin Zakariyya.

Shaykh Abul Najib Suhrawardi

Abu'l Najib 'Abd al Kahir bin 'Abd Allah al Bakri (1097-1168) was a Sunni mystic who flourished in the 12th century. He was born in Suhraward in the Jibal region. As a young man he came to Baghdad and studied the *hadith*, *Fiqh* and Arabic grammar and literature at the famous Nizamiya *madrasa*. When he was in his twenties, he abandoned formal studies, turned to asceticism and returned to Isfahan . There he joined Ahmad al Ghazali (d. 1126), the illustrious mystic and brother of Muhammad al Ghazali, and became his disciple. Later on he returned to Baghdad where he became a disciple of Hammad al Dabbas (d. 1131), an unlettered Sufi of great excellence, who was also the *pir* of Abdul Qadir Jilani. He taught *fiqh* and

hadith as well as mysticism in a *madrasa* and for a while lectured also at the Nizamiya. He wrote a work in Arabic, *Adab al Muridin* ('The Etiquette of the Disciple'), which a number of Indian Sufis subsequently translated into Persian. He had numerous disciples, one of whom, Shihabuddin Suhrawardi, his nephew, went on to give an organizational form to his teachings and doctrines.

Shaykh Shihabuddin Suhrawardi

Shihabuddin Abu Hafis al Suhrawardi (1145-1235) was born in Suhraward and came to Baghdad as a youth. He studied theology under Shaykh Abdul Qadir Jilani, but also attended the lectures of other prominent scholars, including those given by his uncle, Abu Najib, both at the Nizamiyya and at the latter's *ribat* (hospice) on the bank of the Tigris . It was his uncle who initiated him into Sufism. After his uncle's death in 1168, he withdrew from the world and began to teach in the *ribat*. His teachings generated great interest and he started to give lectures at other places in the city as well. He was a great orator and could hold the attention of the audience for hours, bringing many to the state of spiritual awakening. He maintained friendly relations with many known Sufis of the day and knew, among others, Muinuddin Chishti, the founder of the Chishti centre in Ajmer and Najmuddin Kubra, the great Sufi of the Kubrawiyya order. Legendary accounts speak of his meeting in Baghdad with Ibn 'Arabi and Ruzbihan al Baqli.

Shihabuddin Suhrawardi became very close to the Abbasid caliph, al Nasir, who founded a beautiful *khanqah* for him. He acted as the court theologian and was elevated to the position of *Shaykh al Shuyukh* within the Sufi circles of Baghdad . On a number of occasions he acted as the caliph's envoy to the courts of contemporary rulers. This association gave rise to

the Suhrawardi tradition of keeping in touch with temporal rulers and the order's approval of the acceptance of lavish gifts.

Shihabuddin Suhrawardi wrote a number of books of which '*Awarif al Ma'arif*' ('The Benefits of Knowledge') is the most important. It continued the tradition of the earlier Sufi manuals of al Sarraj and Kalabadhi but it rearranged the earlier material and supplemented it with new information. The text went on to become the most closely studied piece of literature of the Sufis, with both Suhrawardis and the Chishtis using it as a practical guide. Besides chapters dealing with specific topics, such as the definition of the Sufi, derivation of the term, the concept of *tauhid*, (Monotheism) the mystic way, prayer, *dhikr*, (remembrance of God) meditation, *sama'*, (musical assembly) etc., it also talks about the role of the *shaykh* and his relationship with his disciples. For the first time it describes the Sufi hospice, (*khanqah*), and discusses various issues concerned with running it.

After his death, he was succeeded in Baghdad by his son, 'Imaduddin Muhammad Suhrawardi (d. 1257) who acted as the custodian of the *ribat*. Other disciples were ordered by the Shaykh to return to their homelands and establish new centres there.

Shaykh Bahauddin Zakariya

Shaykh Bahauddin (1182-1262), whose forefathers probably came to India with the armies of Muhammad bin Qasim and settled in Sind, was born at Kot Karor near Multan. His father died when he was twelve. At first he studied in the village and later decided to go in search of knowledge to Khurasan. He spent seven years in Bhukhara, and then traveled to Makkah and Madinah . In Madinah he stayed for five years and studied the *hadith* with a distinguished *muhaddith* Shaykh Kamaluddin Muhammad Yamani from

whom he received a *sanad* i.e., a formal authorization, to teach the *hadith*. From there he went on to Jerusalem and then, Baghdad, where he joined the circle of disciples of Shaykh Shihabuddin Suhrawardi, who initiated him into his order and made him his *khalifah*.

The story goes on to say that Shaykh Bahauddin was so receptive to spiritual teachings that it took him a mere 17 days to grasp the entire spiritual course. He had *khalifat* conferred upon him within such a short period that the other disciples felt jealous, for they had not been able to achieve this even after many years of training under the Shaykh. When the Shaykh learnt of their complaint, he explained that Bahauddin was like dry wood that caught fire immediately, whereas they were like green wood that takes time to catch fire.

Shaykh Bahauddin was directed by his Shaykh to return to the subcontinent and settle in Multan to spread the teachings received from him. However, the *ulama* were not happy with his arrival and this gave rise to a conflict between the *ulama* and the Sufis, with Shaykh Bahauddin being targeted by Maulana Qutbuddin Kashani. Maulana Kashani was a greatly respected scholar of Multan. He enjoyed the support of the rulers who even built a *madrassa* for him to teach in. He strongly disapproved of the Sufis and was not happy, despite the fact that Bahauddin came to his *madrassa* to say the morning prayers. Nevertheless, the Shaykh fared well in Multan and erected an extensive *khanqah* where the prominent men of the area visited him to discuss theological issues and seek his advice.

The Shaykh took an interest in political matters and invited Sultan Shamsuiddin Iltutmish to conquer Multan and add it to the Delhi Sultanate. The Qadi of Multan also joined the Shaykh in this invitation. Both letters fell into the hands of Qabacha, the ruler of Multan. He had the Qadi executed and summoned the Shaykh to his palace. On being shown the letter and

asked for an explanation, the Shaykh boldly replied that he had written the letter on divine inspiration. The ruler finally did nothing.

After Iltutmish succeeded in annexing Multan and Sind in 1228, he gave Shaykh Bahauddin Zakariya the title of *Shaykh ul Islam*. This was an honorary title conferred on religious dignitaries and carried with it monetary stipends and lands. The recipients were not obliged to attend the court regularly but only to offer the rulers occasional advice. Thus the Shaykh acquired additional income for his *khanqah*. Shaykh Bahauddin had good relations with the Chishti Sufis like Khawaja Qutbuddin Bakhtiar Kaki and Baba Farid. He laid great stress on performing *namaz* and held that all blessings were the result of performing obligatory prayers. To him, missing an obligatory prayer was akin to spiritual death. *Dhikr* and supererogatory prayers were assigned a secondary place in his Sufi discipline. He did not think, unlike the Chishtis, that continuous fasting was necessary for a Sufi, and advised a regular diet. Sometimes, he indulged himself in *sama'* like the Chishti Sufis though, in general, the Suhrawardis did not favour it. Meditation and contemplation meant for him the freeing of the heart from everything other than the thought of God.

He was the most popular Sufi in and around Multan, and because he did not stay away from political issues, the rulers and nobles also turned to him for his blessings and prayers. Due to his fame and influence, he was even able to successfully negotiate peace with the Mongols, who besieged the Multan fort in 1247.

One important feature of the Suhrawardi order, which was also upheld by Bahauddin, was that neither the order nor he were against possessing wealth earned by lawful means. After his needs and the needs of his family and the *khanqah* were fulfilled, what was left of the money received by him as gifts was used for humanitarian purposes for the benefit of the public.

This did not, however, imply that everything was to be distributed every day and nothing kept for the next. Not surprisingly, he was criticized for his views on the possession of wealth and property and for his close association with the rulers. But, to him, this was not un-Islamic, for after all, the *shariah* did not declare property and wealth unlawful in itself. What was condemnable for him was to neglect the higher spiritual and moral values for an involvement in worldly affairs. As long as material things could be kept away from one's heart, there was no harm in possessing them. Another important point to be kept in mind was that worldly resources had to be spent on righteous purposes.

The criticism that Shaykh Bahauddin involved himself in politics, favouring certain rulers above others, ignores the fact that he had good relations only with good rulers. Sultan Iltutmish was an honest and capable monarch, so the Shaykh supported him in his invasion of Sind. When the Mongols raided the country, he felt it was his duty to extend his full support in the establishment of the newly formed Delhi Sultanate.

Shaykh Bahauddin disapproved of the Sufis seeking guidance from a number of different *pirs* and being initiated into a number of orders at the same time. He wanted a seeker of guidance to surrender to one rather than many. After he died, his tomb in Multan became a centre of pilgrimage. He strove hard and, within about half a century, the Suhrawardi order was firmly established as one of the leading Sufi orders on the subcontinent. His *khalifas* carried on his mission.

Qazi Hamiduddin Nagauri

Qazi Hamiduddin Nagauri was the most learned amongst the *khalifas* of Shaykh Shihabuddin Suhrawardi. His family migrated from Bhukhara to Delhi at some point before 1200, where his father, Ataullah died. Shaykh

Hamid was appointed the Qazi of Nagaur and served in this position for 3 years. He did not find the service inwardly rewarding, so he left for Baghdad, where he met Shaykh Shihabuddin Suhrawardi and became his disciple. It was also there that he met Khwaja Qutbuddin Bakhtiar Kaki, who later became a renowned Sufi of the Chishti order. Hamiduddin and Qutbuddin became friends. Under the influence of Qutbuddin Bakhtiar Kaki, Hamiduddin started taking an interest in *sama*, thereby arousing the opposition of the *ulama*. He was also very close to Qutbuddin's famous disciple, Nizamuddin Auliya. When the latter died, it was Qazi Hamiduddin Nagauri who invested his successor Baba Farid, by presenting him with the relics of his Shaykh.

Qazi Hamiduddin was a writer with several works to his credit. *Lawaih* ('Flashes of Light') was an important Sufi text, but it did not survive the ravages of time. It is attested that Baba Farid used to study it with his disciples. Three other works of Hamiduddin have, however, survived and these are: *Ishqiyya*, *Tawali' al Shumus* ('Points Where the Suns Rise'), and *Risala Min Kalam*.

In *Ishqiyya*, Qazi Hamiduddin explains the relationship between the Lover and the Beloved, saying that they appear to be two separate identities, but are in fact one. Here the Beloved is God and the Sufi the Lover. To become one with his Beloved the Sufi must annihilate his ego. The more successful he is in this, the greater the possibility of his achieving the ultimate goal. He goes on to say that love is the source of everything that exists and both the Lover and the Beloved mirror each other. In short, the essence of all existing beings is God.

Tawali' al Shumus is an exposition of God's names. According to him, God's greatest name is *Huwa* or He and he says that *Huwa* or He indicates His eternal nature—holy and free from decline and fall, explaining this

further by quoting chapter 112 from the Qur'an: "Say: 'God is One, the Eternal God. He begot none, nor was He begotten. None is equal to Him.'"

Shaykh Jalaluddin Tabrezi

Shaykh Jalaluddin Tabrezi (d. 1266) was one of the most devoted disciples of Shihabuddin Suhrawardi. Before becoming his disciple, he was, like his father, a disciple of Abu Sa'id of Tabriz. After his death he left for Baghdad and became a disciple of Shihabuddin Suhrawardi. His devotion to his mentor knew no bounds and it is said that he used to carry food for him wherever he went, and warmed it on the spot to serve whenever required.

He left Baghdad together with Bahauddin Zakariyya and traveled with him as far as Multan, but while Bahauddin Zakariyya remained in Multan, Jalaluddin Tabrezi carried on to Delhi. He stayed there for a while but finally decided it was not the best place for him and continued his journey eastwards. He established himself in Bengal and was responsible for spreading Islam there. At first he stayed in Lakhnauti, where he built a *khanqah*, and then moved on to Deva Mahal in northern Bengal. Deva Mahal came to be known as Tabrizabad and became a centre of pilgrimage. Large numbers of Hindus and Buddhists converted to Islam under his influence. His disciples were possessed of a missionary zeal and found many converts among the lower classes, who being persecuted by the zamindars, (landowners) embraced Islam to share in the equality and human brotherhood they had been denied for centuries.

Nuruddin Mubarak Ghaznavi

Sayyed Nuruddin Mubarak Ghaznavi (d. 1235) was an important *khalifah* of Shaykh Shihabuddin. His early life is virtually unknown but, when he came to Delhi, he was already famous and Iltutmish appointed him as *Shaykh*

ul Islam. The people of Delhi called him *Mir-e-Delhi* (Lord of Delhi). According to Ziauddin Barni, he often visited the Sultan and did not hesitate to criticize the non-Islamic customs of the court.

He believed that Islam could be protected only when the rulers followed its principles, and that a ruler who followed these principles would be raised with the prophets and the saints on the Day of Judgement. The rulers, he felt, should practice *din-panahi* or 'the protection of the Islamic way of life' and see to it that the commands of the *shariah* were observed. Sins, debauchery and adultery should not be tolerated. Offenders should be ruthlessly punished. The pious should be entrusted with the duty to enforce the *shariah* and the officers appointed to carry out this task should be well versed in both the *shariah* and the *tariqa*. He was against philosophers. He felt that their teachings should be prohibited in the territories under Islam. He believed that justice should be rigorously dispensed and that the tyrants should be overthrown. He seems to have been an extremist who could not tolerate anything but orthodox Islam. He even went to the extent of saying that those rulers who did not follow the principles enumerated by him risked damnation in the Hereafter, and that prayer and fasting alone was not going to benefit them.

It is said that he performed *hajj* twelve times. He was in Delhi during the reign of Sultan Iltutmish when he was offered the post of *Sadr us Sudur*, which he accepted. But after two years, he resigned and devoted the rest of his life to spiritual exercises.

The Spiritual Descendents of Bahauddin Zakariya

In Multan, Bahauddin Zakariya was succeeded by his son, Shaykh Sadruddin, (d.1286), known as Arif, or 'gnostic'. A disciple of Shaykh Sadruddin compiled the *malfuzaat* of his teacher and called it *Kunuz'ul Fawa'id*.

Although the work has not survived, Shaykh ‘Abdul Haqq Muhaddith quotes it extensively in his *Akhbaru’l Akhyar*. He also gives extracts from the works and *malfuzaat* of his son and successor, Shaykh Ruknuddin Abul Fath (d. 1334), who was a great admirer of Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya and often said that he visited Delhi mainly to see the Shaykh. His works did not survive either.

Shaykh Ruknuddin was succeeded by his grandson, Shaykh Hud, whom the governor of Sind accused of misappropriating the income of the *khanqah* for his personal use. The Sultan ordered the governor to seize the entire property of the *khanqah*, thereby reducing the Shaykh to utter poverty. He was finally executed on a false charge. With his execution, the *khanqah* of Shaykh Bahauddin Zakariya in Multan ceased to be the centre of Sufi activity.

After the death of Shaykh Ruknuddin, the order declined in Multan, only to be rejuvenated in Uch. The Sufi who infused it with new life was Sayyid Jalaluddin Bukhari (1308-1384), popularly known as *Makhdum-i Jahaniyan* (Lord of the Mortals). He was the son of one of the disciples of Bahauddin Zakariya, Sayyid Jalaluddin, also called Jalal Surkh or Red Jalal. He was originally from Bhukhara but migrated to India, finally settling in Uch.

Sayyid Jalaluddin Bukhari, *Makhdum-i Jahaniyan*, was educated in the usual branches of the religious sciences and initiated into the Suhrawardi order by Shaykh Ruknuddin. He lived mainly in Uch in the north west, but made frequent trips to Delhi and is also said to have traveled to many different parts of the Islamic world, where he met the leading Sufis of the times. He was appointed *Shaykh ul Islam* by Sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq who also made him the head of a *khanqah* in Siwistan in Sind. Sultan Mohammad bin Tughlaq controlled the appointments of the heads of the Sufi *khanqah* so as to keep them under his influence.

Jalaluddin objected strongly to transplanting Hindu practices into Islamic tradition and spoke against exploding crackers at festivals, referring to Allah by Hindu names such as *Thakur* (Lord) or *Kartar* (Creator), and the whitewashing of graves and placing lamps on them at night on the occasion of *Shab-i Barat*. Like other Suhrawardis, he believed that the Sufis should maintain a relationship with the rulers and the officials, so that they could better serve humanity at large. His disciples compiled his sayings in a work known as *Khulasatul Alfaz Jamiul-Ulum*.

Besides Sadruddin Arif and Jalaludin Surkhi, Bahauddin Zakariya had a number of other prominent disciples, of which the most famous were Shaykh Fakhruddin Ibrahim Iraqi and Hasan Afghan.

Hasan Afghan was illiterate but the Shaykh was very proud of him. He would often say that if God asked him what he had brought with him, he would present Hasan as a gift. There is a story that illustrates the spiritual values that form the basis of this reverence. Once Hasan Afghan went to a mosque to perform *namaz* and took his place in the row behind the Imam. When the *namaz* was over, Hasan went up to the Imam and said: “Khwaja! You began the *namaz* and I followed you. In your thoughts you travelled from here to Delhi, did some shopping, then went to Khurasan and Multan and then back to the mosque. What sort of *namaz* is this?”

About another *khalifah* of Bahauddin, Annemarie Schimmel writes: ‘It may be that Bahauddin Zakariya would not have been so well known if a noted poet had not lived in his entourage for nearly 25 years.’¹ Shaykh Fakhruddin Ibrahim (d.1289), who wrote under the pen name of Iraqi, was the poet in question. He came from the neighbourhood of Hamadan where he lectured in a *madrassa*. He fell in love with a handsome youth and followed

^[1] Schimmel, A., *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 1975, p.352

him and his group till he reached Multan. Here he stopped at the *khanqah* of Shaykh Bahauddin, who assigned him a cell to stay in. Apparently, for the first ten days he did not leave the cell at all and on the eleventh, came out singing poetry, laid down his head at the saint's feet and wept. The Shaykh raised him from his prostration and, taking off his own mystic robe, placed it upon him.

Though in principle Bahauddin was opposed to poetry and music, he tolerated Iraqi's addiction. Iraqi stayed in Multan as long as the Shaykh lived and then left. First he traveled to Makkah to perform *hajj* and later on, all over Asia Minor. In Konia he met Sadruddin Qonawi, a *khalifah* of Jalaluddin Rumi, and attended his lectures on Ibn 'Arabi's *Fusus al Hikam*. He might have even met Rumi himself. From Konia he travelled on to Egypt and Syria, where he died. He was buried in Damascus, close to the grave of Ibn 'Arabi.

Of the numerous works of Fakhruddin Iraqi, the most famous is his treatise *Lama'at* ('Flashes'), which is inspired by the mystical philosophy of Ibn 'Arabi. Like his spiritual master, Iraqi sees his God, the eternally beautiful beloved, everywhere and puts his views forward in beautiful prose interspersed with Persian poetry. The treatise went on to become a much studied Sufi text and a number of commentaries were written on it, one of them being by Jami. His other works include a *Diwan* and a *masnavi* entitled *'Ushshaq-nama* ('Book of Lovers').

The Suhrawardi order was fortunate in having yet another gifted literary follower. His name was Amir Husaini (d. *circa* 1320) and he is variously described as the disciple of either Bahauddin Zakariya or his son, Sadruddin.

Amir Husaini was born in Ghizy, a village in Ghur, where he had his initial education. He came to Multan at some point during the reign of Sultan Iltutmish,

where he joined the Suhrawardi *khanqah*. He wrote numerous works and in one of them, a *masnavi* called *Kanzu'r Rumuz* ('The Treasure of Mysteries'), he lavishes praise on the Suhrawardi shaykhs: Shihabuddin, Bahauddin Zakariya and Sadruddin. It is in this work that he states his interest in *sama'* and considers it to be a practice reserved exclusively for holy men. Besides the *masnavi*, he wrote other numerous works like *Nuzhatu'ul arwah* ('Delight of the Souls'), which describes the spiritual path of the Sufis; *Tabatu'l Majalis* ('Emotion of Mystic Assemblies'), a prose work dealing with ethics; *Zadu'l Musafirin* ('Provisions for Travelers on the Sufi Path'), which evokes Sanai's *Hadiqatu'l Haqiqa* and Sadi's *Gulistan*; a *Diwan* and some other pieces of writing which are known by name but copies of which have not yet come to light. There is also a record of his exchanging letters with a celebrated mystic of Tabriz, Saduddin Mahmud Shabistari (d. 1320), on the topic of Sufism, the whole epistles set in the form of questions and answers. When Shaykh Sadruddin died, he left Multan and settled in Herat.

Among the descendants of Makhdum-i Jahaniyan of Uch was Shaykh Samauddin (d. 1496). He left Uch after his initiation into the Sufi way and traveled in Gujarat and Rajasthan, settling finally in Delhi during the reign of Sultan Bahlul Lodi (1451-1489). He was highly respected by the Sultan as well as his successor, Sultan Sikandar (1489-1517) who sought the Shaykh's blessings before his coronation. He authored a number of works of which the most famous is a commentary on Iraqi's *Lamaa't*. His most famous disciple was Shaykh Hamid bin Fazlullah (d. 1536) better known as Jamali Kanbo Dihlawi. He was a great traveler and a great poet, whose *Siyarul 'Arifin* ('Biographies of the Gnostics') contains a number of autobiographical references. He was a prolific writer who left a voluminous *Diwan* and a *masnavi*, *Mihr wa Mah*, a love story with a mystic theme.

The Suhrawardis were successful in spreading their order not only in

Gujarat and Delhi, but also in Kashmir. A disciple of a *khalifah* of Shihabuddin Suhrawardi, named Sayyid Sharafuddin, came to Kashmir from Turkestan in the 14th century and converted Richana, the Buddhist ruler of Laddakh to Islam. Sayyid Sharfuddin is remembered in Kashmir as Bulbul Shah and reputedly his *khanqah* became a great centre of Sufi activities. As he had no outstanding successors, it fell into abeyance after his death. However, the Suhrawardi teachings were revived by Sayyid Muhammad Isfahani, a disciple of Makhdum-i Jahaniyan, who was a contemporary of Sultan Zainu'l 'Abidin (1420-70) of Kashmir.

Suhrawardi Thought and Practice

The Suhrawardis entered India in the 13th century and went on to consolidate their hold over the Indian mind as a result of the activities of the *khalifas* of Shaykh Shihabuddin Suhrawardi. Initially, they were centred in Multan in Sind, but later their teachings were carried on to other parts of north India with centres developing in Delhi, Badayun and in Bengal . The Sufis of the Chishti order were already there in Ajmer, Delhi, Nagaur and Ajodhan. There was much interaction between these two orders and the great masters of both corresponded with each other and also met personally. There are records of Hamiduddin Suvali of Nagaur, a Chishti shaykh, writing to Bahauddin Zakariya on the issue of the wealth that Sufis were permitted to hold, along with that of a meeting of both in Delhi . Qadi Hamiduddin Nagaori, a Suhrawardi shaykh and a close friend of Qutubuddin Bakhtiar Kaki and his *khalifah* Nizamuddin Auliya, in fact, performed the formal handing over of the relics of Nizamuddin Auliya to Baba Farid, his spiritual successor.

A Sufi text, '*Awarifu'l Ma'arif*', written by Shihabuddin Suhrawardi, was the standard manual for most of the Sufis of the subcontinent, with both the

Suhrawardis and the Chishtis using it as a handbook to train disciples. Baba Farid taught it to his pupils together with another text, *Lawa'ih*, a lost text of Qadi Hamiduddin Nagori, which was then considered to be the most advanced text on mysticism. In principle, the traditions of both the orders were not opposed to each other, though they favoured and laid stress on different sets of practices.

The life of the disciples was organized around the *khanqah*, which included the living quarters of the presiding shaykh, dormitories for the followers and pilgrims, cells for meditation, a communal kitchen and a dining hall. The Chishtis preferred to use the term *jamaat khana* rather than *khanqah*, but both were essentially interchangeable. Most of the Chishti hospices were originally built in places far removed from urban centres, and any urban activity around them was a later development mostly due to the popularity of the shrine.

The Suharwardi *khanqahs* were as a rule established with the help of grants, for the Suhrawardis accepted gifts from rulers and wealthy merchants. They therefore had no dearth of money, for riches were treasured as future assets, a principle diametrically opposite to that followed in Chishti hospices, where nothing was to be kept for the next day. It is said that Shaykh Bahauddin Zakariya was probably the richest saint of medieval India and his lifestyle differed considerably from the austere, God-trusting atmosphere of his Chishti neighbours. His *khanqah* was well run. He had fixed hours for reception. Instead of devoting himself to continuous austerities, he preferred to keep a well-filled granary in order to be able to live lavishly. He believed there was nothing wrong with possessing wealth, for it could not corrupt a Suhrawardi Sufi if he was totally devoted to the spiritual ideal.²

^[2] see the earlier section on controversy between Bahauddin Zakariya and a Chishti saint, Sheikh Hamiduddin Suvali of Nagaur, on the issue of property

Neither did Shaykh Bahauddin Zakariyya consider it necessary to open his doors to all and sundry. He did not tolerate *qalandars*, (mystic wanderer) for he believed that everyone should work and earn a living instead of opting for a life of dependency. But his successors, like Shaykh Ruknuddin, were more tolerant. They felt that it was the demands of the *qalandars* and dervishes that justified the Shaykhs' monetary possessions.

The culture of the Chishti *jamaat khana*s was somewhat different and everyone was welcomed there. Even if there was nothing in the *jamaat khana* to offer to the visitor, a glass of water would be presented with apologies. The Chishtis believed in and practiced the principle of the equality and brotherhood of all men, for all were God's creatures in equal measure. In this ideology, there was no room for discrimination between one and the other. They were all God's servants, seekers of truth and deserving of respect.

The concept of *wahdat al wujud* was not really present in the Sufi thought of the subcontinent till almost the 14th century. Iraqi, a *khalifah* of Bahauddin Zakariyya and a great poet who was familiar with the ideas of Ibn 'Arabi, introduced them in his writings. Before that, the most studied text '*Awariful Ma'arif*, and other contemporary texts spoke of the oneness of a mystic with God only in the terms of love, using the metaphor: "Lover, love and beloved are all one". Each aspirant to the Sufi path was required to begin his spiritual course with *tawba* (repentance). This was done under the guidance of the *pir*, and the *salik* was asked to submit to the divine will. The two orders differed to some extent as regards the details of these rituals.

The Suharwardis attached great importance to *salat* (prayer) and *dhikr* (remembrance of God) as far as the purification of the soul was concerned. They believed that fasting in the month of Ramadan was sufficient for this purpose. This annual training course, if performed properly, would suffice

for the whole year. Shaykh Bahauddin Zakariya recited this verse of the Qur'an to his followers: "Eat what is pure and act righteously." The advice Shaykh Jalaluddin Tabrizi, another Suhrawardi saint, gave to his followers is very telling: "Eat three times a day and use the strength gained from the food for prayers and abstention from sin."³

The Chishtis, however, believed in rigorous ascetic exercises. They laid heavy emphasis on fasting in order to achieve the goal of spiritual purification. They often fasted on alternate days. Even when they ate, they ate sparingly. Self-mortification, meditation and contemplation formed essential parts of Chishti life. The Chishtis also used a number of different techniques, particularly of exhalation and inhalation, which they learnt from the yogis. They combined these yoga techniques with *dhikr* to achieve concentration, which was essential to the enhancement of mystical sensitivity. *Sama'*, which was geared towards achieving the same goal, that is union with God, formed an indispensable part of the Chishti rituals. The Suhrawardis did not attach such importance to *sama'* but they too indulged in it occasionally. They did not reject it altogether, allowing it only for the *salik* at an advanced stage.

The Suhrawardi order was closer to the true, orthodox spirit of Islam. It did not preach a renunciation of the world in the way that the Chishtis did, for the Chishtis not only renounced wealth and desire, but sometimes even marital relations, often practicing celibacy like Nizamuddin Auliya and Bakhtiar Kaki. The Suhrawardis allowed everything which was labeled legitimate in Islam. They focused on the recitation of *dhikr* and the prescribed fasting in the month of Ramadan, but did not encourage supererogatory fasting. They went even further, sternly rejecting the practice of self-prostration before the Shaykh, a practice widely adopted by the Chishtis.

³ *Fawa'id ul Fuad*, p. 226

The Naqshbandi Order

Khwaja Bahauddin Naqshband (1317-1389), the founder of the Naqshbandi order, was born at Kushk-i-Hinduwan, a village near Bhukhara in Central Asia. Later, in his honour, the village came to be known as Kushk-i-Arifan. The title *Naqshband* that he used literally means ‘a painter’ or ‘an embroiderer’. It is possible that it refers to the profession followed by his family, but it may just as easily have been a metaphorical usage indicative of his spiritual capacity to imprint the name of God upon a disciple’s heart.

In the mediaeval period, it was not uncommon for children to be sent to the Sufis to receive spiritual knowledge, but this was usually done after they had acquired an education in the traditional disciplines such as the recitation of the Qur’an and the study of the *hadith* and jurisprudence. At the age of 18, Khwaja Bahauddin was likewise entrusted to a Sufi saint, Muhammad Baba as-Samasi (d. 1354), who lived in a village called Samas. This saint was a spiritual descendent of Khwaja AbuYaqubYusuf al-Hamadani (d. 1140), founder of *silsila-i-khwajgan*. It is said that Samasi could see the latent spirituality and greatness of Bahauddin and therefore assigned his training to his chief *murid*, Amir Kulal (d. 1371). It did not take Bahauddin long to achieve mastery in the required spiritual exercises. This made the Shaykh so pleased with his progress that he appointed him his *khalifah*.

Early in his association with Amir Kulal, Bahauddin had a vision in which he saw his six predecessors in the *silsila*, beginning with ‘Abd al Khaliq

Ghujduwani (d. 1220), a successor of Hamadani. This vision amounted to a second initiation, for Ghujduwani enjoined Bahauddin to practice the silent *dhikr* exclusively, as opposed to the *dhikr* spoken aloud (*dhikr bil jehr*) in which his master and other disciples used to engage.¹ This scandalized his co-travellers on the Sufi path but finally his Shaykh, as-Samasi himself, allowed him to follow his way.

After his mentor's death, Bahauddin left Samas for Samarqand, visiting Bhukhara and a number of other towns. The Sufis were well-known for their contempt of worldly life and their commitment to the quest for truth and spirituality. Those could be, of course, found in the study of books. Books were certainly of great value, for they prepared one to become receptive to truth and spirituality. However, the Sufis preferred to follow the tradition of wandering from place to place in search of individuals who 'realized God', so that they might learn from their actual spiritual experience. They believed that spiritual knowledge was transferred from heart to heart, the only proviso being that the owner of the heart possessed the required receptivity, for without it he might not recognize spirituality when it was bestowed. Actual journeys for spiritual ends were facilitated by the fact that the seekers carried no worldly possessions which could pose an obstacle to their search.

Bahauddin took the same route and went from place to place in search of enlightened souls who could show him the spiritual path. In the course of his mystic apprenticeship, he even grazed herds for several years. The purpose of this varied, itinerant training was to build up a sense of service, and awaken the feelings of love, compassion and generosity, which were considered necessary for the seeker. The last years of his life were spent in his own home town near Bhukhara. He died in his native village in 1389.

¹ see: Algar, H., *Naqshband*, EI,(?) Leiden, 1961

The Khwaja lived a very simple life. When asked the reason for such a choice, he replied: "Ownership does not go with the mystic path," meaning that the moment one came to possess worldly objects, one's heart became attached to them. This was the biggest obstacle in reaching out to God or Truth. The learned men of other religions like Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism share this view. They believe that the heart cannot concentrate simultaneously on these two aspects of life which are so diametrically opposed to each other. If one wants to discover Truth and/or God, one must be content with the bare necessities, so that there is no hindrance to one's progress.

Khwaja Bahauddin believed that without holding fast to the ways of the Prophet and his companions, that is, to the path of the *shariah*, one could not attain the realization of God, for obviously, one can attain God only by treading the path shown by God through His prophets.

He took great interest in the spiritual training and education of his disciples. Often the disciples were converts from other faiths, and therefore needed greater attention, having no previous knowledge of Islamic beliefs. He spared no effort in training them thoroughly so that they might communicate the message to the uninitiated. Shah Waliullah, a much later Naqshbandi and a great scholar, says that in laying down such a rigorous and exacting discipline for his disciples, Khwaja Bahauddin was influenced by his sober Turkish background.

Khwaja Bahauddin popularized the spiritual order of his predecessor throughout the whole of Central Asia, attracting people from all walks of life. It is on record that he did go out to meet a number of the contemporary rulers and nobles, but on principle he avoided any contacts with them as far as possible. This was dictated by his desire to keep his income untainted by anything forbidden and thus illegitimate, and he did not trust the ruling

class to be committed to observing the law in this regard. He therefore usually refrained from mixing with them or having food with them.

The Pioneers of the Order

The order into which Bahauddin Naqshbandi was initiated, and which he was to reorganize to become one of the most popular orders of the day was known as *silsila-i-khwajgan*. It traced its origins to the first caliph, Abu Bakr, and another senior companion of the Prophet, Salman Farsi. It was founded by Khwaja Abu Yaqub Yusuf al-Hamadani (d. 1140), who studied in Baghdad and went on to live in Herat and Marw, where he died. Of his disciples four are known by name: Khwaja Abdullah Barqi, Khwaja Hasan Andaqi, Khwaja Ahmad Yiswi, and Khwaja Abd al Khaliq Ghujdawani.

Khwaja Abdul Khaliq bin Abul Jamil (d. 1179), who came from Ghujduwan near Bhukhara, was the true originator of the features unique to the *silsila*. He wrote in Persian, both poetry and prose, and is credited with having written a number of treatises defining his views of the Sufi way. Of these the most famous are: *Risala-i-Tariqat* ('Treatise on the Spiritual Path'), *Nasihah-namah* ('Treatise of Advice') and *Risala-i Sahibiyyah* ('The Sahibiyya Treatise'). Most of his works did not survive but his teachings are accessible in a later work, *Rashahat-i 'Ainul Hayat* ('Tricklings from the Fountain of Life') by Fakhruddin Husain Kashfi (d. 1516), a brother-in-law of Jami. This work dates back to 1504 and is a mine of fairly reliable information on the Naqshbandis. Bahauddin's spiritual will (*Nasihah-namah*), which is contained therein, gives the following instructions to his disciples:

'Familiarize yourselves with Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and the traditions of the Prophet (*hadith*). Do not consort with mystics who are illiterate. Say your prayers in congregation. Do not crave renown. Reject

any offers of official positions. Neither stand surety for anyone nor be yourself litigious. Avoid the company of rulers and princes. Do not construct a *khanqah*. Turn a deaf ear to too much mystic music, but do not condemn it entirely. Eat only what is lawful. To the extent possible, do not marry a woman who hankers after the comforts and convenience of a worldly life. Laughter corrodes the heart. Your heart should be grief-stricken, your body like that of a sick man, and your eyes filled with tears. You should be sincere in whatever you do, particularly in saying your prayers. You should dress in threadbare clothing and keep company with dervishes. Your only wealth should be your poverty, your home should be the mosque and God should be your friend.²

He also formulated eight principles to be observed by the disciples:

1. *hosh dar dam*: 'Awareness of every breath.' The Sufi must remember God and remain in a state of total awareness while breathing, for he should never let air in and out of his lungs without giving proper thought to what he is doing.
2. *Nazar bar qadam*: 'Watching every step.' A *salik* (one who treads the Sufis' spiritual path) must evaluate all his actions, for every move he makes should be in the direction of fulfilling some divine purpose.
3. *safar dar watan*: 'Traveling to the homeland' or introspection, that is, the practice of scrutinizing one's inner self in order to fully appreciate the state of one's own psyche.
4. *khalwat dar anjuman*: 'Solitude in an assembly' or solitariness when in the company of others, that is, engaging externally with one's fellow men, yet all the while remaining internally alone in a spiritual conclave with the Almighty.

² see *Rashahat Ainul Hayat*, Kanpur, 1911, p. 31

5. *yad kard*: remembrance.

6. *baz gard*: keeping one's thinking under constraints.

7. *nigah dasht*: being vigilant about the shape one's thinking is taking.

8. *yad dasht*: cherishing the Almighty by focusing one's full attention on His remembrance.³

The spiritual followers of 'Abd al-Khaliq Ghujdawani developed a whole philosophy of mystic discipline based on these principles. Bahauddin Naqshband, who is said to have had training from the spirit of Khwaja Ghujdawani, added three more points to those of his predecessor:

9. *wuqf-i 'adadi*: being vigilant about recalling God, so that one's attention is not diverted.

10. *wuqf-i zamani*: taking stock of one's activities, while showing gratitude to God for the time devoted to virtuous deeds, and repenting of one's misdeeds.

11. *wuqf-i qalbi*: keeping the heart alive and receptive to God's messages.⁴

These practices were designed to regulate man's whole inner existence. They gave clear expression to spiritual experience, and defined the spiritual states passed through by the mystic while on a spiritual quest.

The line of spiritual succession runs from Khwaja Ghujdwani to Bahauddin thus: 'Arif Riwgari (d. 1259), Mahmud Anjir Faghnavi (d. 1245 or 1272), 'Azizan 'Ali ar-Rimtini (d. 1306 or 1322), Muhammad Baba as-Samasi (d. 1306 or 1322), Sayyid Amir Kulal al-Bukhari (d. 1371) and Khwaja Bahauddin Naqshband.

³ *Rashahat 'Ainu'l Hayat*, Kanpur, 1911, pp.. 20-25

⁴ *ibid.* , pp. 26-27

Khwaja 'Ali Ramitini used to practice *dhikr* in a loud voice. When asked about this, he replied that a beginner was supposed to repeat the name of Allah loudly, but advanced mystics could do it in their hearts, that is, by silent repetition. His dedication to the mission is evident from the way he worked to disseminate the teachings of his order. While living in Khwarizm, he went every day to the market and engaged labourers. First of all, he would explain to them the Islamic rules of keeping oneself clean, then instruct them on how to say the prayers and what were the proper ways of engaging in other forms of worship. Afterwards he would ask them to do *dhikr* at all times, even when occupied in work. Then, at the end of the day, after having given them religious and spiritual education, he would pay them their wages and let them go home. He kept up this practice for a long time till he died. His ceaseless efforts succeeded in bringing about a spiritual revolution in the region.

Disciples of Khwaja Naqshband

Khwaja Muhammad Parsa (d. 1419) and Khwaja Nasiruddin Ubaidullah Ahrar (d. 1490) were the most noteworthy disciples of Khwaja Naqshband.

Khwaja Muhammad Parsa (d. 1419) was the sole adherant of Bahauddin among the *ulama* of Bhukhara and had to endure much ill will. However he established relations with the Timurids and laid the foundation for the future greatness of the order. He was a great Sufi of his time, and one can gauge his spiritual greatness from his often repeated saying: "One should always pray to God with the same fear and faith with which a dying person turns to Him in supplication." Only a soul that has experienced God could have uttered such words, for it is indeed true that God hears our supplications only when they are made in all sincerity.

Khawaja Ubaidullah Ahrar (1403-1490) was born in a poor family in Shash (Tashkent). His father, Khwaja Mahmud Shashi, was a farmer and his family went through hard times. They did not even have enough clothing to keep themselves warm in winter. He always remembered his difficult days, and this perhaps accounts for his great concern for the poor and the destitute. He did not show any interest in acquiring a formal education. One of his maternal uncles, Khwajah Ibrahim, was keen on having him educated, but his efforts were unsuccessful.

Khawaja Ahrar believed in manual labour and personally set an example of earning a living in this way. After acquiring spiritual training, he returned to his native village and took to cultivating the land himself. He worked so hard that very soon he was able to purchase 33 hundred villages, including the famous village of Kashghar. He was one of the wealthiest Naqshbandi saints, but his wealth did not make him vain. In fact, he regarded pride and arrogance as the greatest moral evils. He believed that a mystic should not succumb to pride and arrogance, for these were opposed to the principles on which spiritual life rests. He was both modest and humane. Regarding service to humanity to be of supreme spiritual value, he spared no effort in helping the poor and the downtrodden. Without doubt his love and affection for the people won the hearts of the high and the low alike. Babar held him in inordinate esteem and considered him a source of spiritual guidance.

Once during the Khwaja's stay in Samarqand, an epidemic broke out. He himself attended the patients, even washing their soiled beds. He used to say: "People have reached their spiritual goals through different gates. In my case it has been through the door of service to mankind." He said that those who did not come to people's assistance were as good as tyrants, and that not only other human beings but also animals were deserving of sympathy.

The Khwaja laid great emphasis on continuous remembrance of God. He did not ask a person to cut himself off from society and meditate in seclusion. A believer could attend to all the routine chores and still have his heart set on the remembrance of God. For him *dhikr* was not a dry utterance of certain fixed phrases, but something that must permeate one's whole being. He believed that the remembrance of God was the life of the heart. He would advise his disciples to remain engrossed in thoughts of God at all times as a prerequisite to spiritual development.

He emphasized physical cleanliness. He said that if the mystics dressed shabbily, they would not be able to attract people to their cause. He always took a very active part in training those newly inducted into the order. Like other *pirs*, he too wanted his followers to have full faith in their spiritual guide, for lack of faith would be an obstacle to their spiritual progress.

Although the Khwaja was not against married life, he felt that it was preferable for mystics to remain single, for marital obligations were a great distraction. He believed that prophets could marry because their concentration level was very high and they did not run the risk of being distracted. As far as ordinary men were concerned, the Khwaja held that they did not require such a high level of concentration and hence marriage did not pose a problem for them.

To the Khwaja, concentration and meditation were to be aimed at, subordinating all one's actions to God's will. God should be forever present in one's thoughts. For a mystic, mental concentration was more important than spontaneous spiritual states of ecstasy, because mental concentration was an abiding thing, while ecstasy was a fleeting experience.

Like Rabia Basri, he also enjoined his disciples to worship God for His love alone, and not for the fear of hell.

According to him, the rulers should not be avoided. Rather, they should be kept in touch with in order to exert a healthy influence on them, and thus protect the Muslims from their tyranny. He had therefore good relations with many princes of the time including Umar Shaykh Mirza, Babar's father, who was in fact his disciple. Babar mentions in *Babar Nama* the positive influence the Khwaja had on his father.

The saints played an important role in the medieval world because of the respect and honour in which they were held. They were also often invited to act as arbitrators in serious conflicts and people lost no time in adopting them as their leaders and guides in both religious and secular matters. Interestingly, they were also approached on matters of physical health. The Sufis kept their doors open to all and sundry. The lowliest and the highest could equally expect their full attention.

Khwaja Ahrar wrote only one book — and that at the insistence of his father, Khwaja Mahmud Shashi — entitled *Risala-i-Walidiyyah* ('Treatise Presented to the Father'). Babar held it in such high esteem that he himself translated it from Persian into Turkish, and in one of his verses he called himself 'the servant of the dervishes.'⁵ He was unwell at that time but strongly believed that working on the treatise would have a healing effect upon him, and help him recover from his illness.

Khwaja Ahrar is considered to be the most influential figure after Bahauddin, and it is from him that all the three regional lines derive – central Asian, western Turkish and Indian. Members of the order were largely responsible for the spread of Islam among the Uzbeks, amongst whom Khwaja Ahrar wielded great spiritual power, and among whom he

⁵ Schimmel, A., *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 1975, p.. 359

consequently played a political role. The heads of all the independent states, which succeeded the Mongols in all lands except Persia, favoured this Sunni order, honouring its leaders during their lifetimes and building mausoleums over their graves. For long the Naqshbandi remained the dominant regional order with centres in Samarqand, Merv, Khiva, Tashkand, Herat and Bhukhara. There were also significant groups in Chinese Turkestan, Afghanistan, Persia, Baluchistan and India.⁶

Abdur Rahman Jami

Mawlana Nur ud din Abdur Rahman Jami (1414-1492) was born in the town of Jam in Khurasan, but spent most of his life in the Timurid court at Herat. He was fortunate enough to complete the course in traditional learning at a young age but the study at the *madrassa* did not satisfy his spiritual yearning. It occurred to him that mysticism might hold the key to ultimate knowledge and thought of the Sufis, who expounded works of *tasawwuf* to select disciples chosen for their aptitude to grasp the hidden meanings. Therefore, he approached a Sufi saint, Khwaja Saiduddin Kashghari (d. 1459), a *khalifah* of Khwajah Bahauddin Naqshband, to give him spiritual training. He was accepted and remained under his guidance for several years.

After the death of Khwaja Said, he became a disciple of Khwajah Ubaidullah Ahrar, another Naqshbandi shaykh, who taught him, amongst other works, *al-Futuhat al Makkiah* ('The Makkan Revelations') of Ibn 'Arabi. As a sign of respect, Jami later wrote a *masnavi*, which he called *Tuhfat-ul-Ahrar*⁷ ('Present to Ahrar'). Khwaja Ahrar on his part was highly appreciative

⁶ Trimmingham, J.S., *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, 1971, p.94

⁷ Ahrar means 'noble' but is also used as a personal name; that is why the name of the poem is alternatively given as *The Present to the Noble*.

of his disciple's spiritual attainments and whenever Mawlana Jami sent his own disciples for further training to Khwaja Ahrar, the latter discouraged the practice, saying that there was no need to take the trouble of coming to him after being trained under Mawlana Jami, as the spiritual training given by him was complete in itself.

Jami left an enormous body of written work spanning virtually all the genres, from prose to poetry. His *Nafahaat al-uns* ('The Breezes of Intimacy from the Sacred Presences'), a collection of over six hundred biographies of Sufis, based on anthologies written several centuries earlier, is an attempt to give the fullest possible picture of Sufism. Together with a book that followed it, *Rashahat-i 'Ainul Hayat* ('Tricklings from the Fountain of Life') written by his brother-in-law, Fakhruddin Husain Kashfi, it is an important source for the history of Sufism in general and the Naqshbandi order in particular.

Of the other Sufi works of Jami, the most important are: *Asheat ul Lama'at* – a commentary on Iraqi's *Lama't*; *Lawam'e* – a commentary on *Fusus ul Hikam* of Ibn 'Arabi; *Naqdun nusur* – a commentary on *Nusus* of Sadr ud din Qunavi.

His contribution to Sufi narrative (*masnavi*) poetry is not devoid of original features. In his *Haft Aurang* ('The Seven Thrones', which in Persian also denotes the constellation of the Great Bear), he extended Nizami's pattern of five poems to a set of seven. Only two of his poems, *Layla va Majnun* and *Khiraadnama-i Iskandari* ('The Book of Alexander's Wisdom'), have subjects represented in the *Khamsa* of his predecessors. The story of Khusraw and Shirin is replaced by the Quranic story of love between Yusuf and Zulaykha, which, in the hands of Jami, became a magnificent tale of mystical love with a powerful allegorical meaning. The set of seven *masnavis* is completed by three didactic poems: *Silsilat az zahb* ('The Golden Chain'), *Tuhfat al-Ahrar*

(The Gift to the Noble'), and *Subhat al asrar* ('The Rosary of the Secrets'). These poems deal with a wide range of subjects relevant to the way of life of the mystics, but also lay stress on the proper behaviour of kings, scholars and poets.

Jami's lyrics, including many ghazals, were assembled in three volumes, according to the stages of his life, following the example set by Amir Khusrow of Delhi: *Faatihaat ash-shabab* ('The Beginnings of Youth'), *Vasatul 'iqd* ('The Middle Pearl of The Necklace'), and *Khatimat al Hayat* ('The Seal of Life'). The influence of Jami exceeded the boundaries of Persian poetry, and is noticeable in the Persian-style poetry of classical Ottoman Turkish literature. Professor Browne has summed up his teachings in these words: "The mystical and pantheistic thought of Persia may be said to have found its most complete and vivid expression in him."

Jami was endowed with a deeply aesthetic temperament and poetic imagination. These might have been the reasons for his conception of God as the Eternal Beauty. Starting from the *hadith*: "I (God) was a hidden treasure and I desired to become known; therefore I brought creation into being in order that I might be known," Jami proposed that the sole purpose of divine creation was to manifest the Beauty of God. Since God was Eternal Beauty, the human soul's craving for beauty was a means to link the soul to God. The ephemeral, transitory beauty of this world thus provided a bridge to the Real Beauty, which was synonymous with God Himself.

Jami believed that a mystic might develop himself spiritually only through divine love. He believed that mundane love for a human being, which he calls *ishq-e-majazi*, helped the mystic to cultivate his love for God, which was the true love or *ishq-i-haqiqi*. The reasoning went thus: Once an adept seeking a mystical union with God was in the grip of human love,

with all the emotions awakened, it was easier for his spiritual guide to divert these emotions towards true love, that is, to God. On the other hand, it was difficult to direct towards and focus on God a person who was not charged with emotions to start with, for such a person was engaged with the world at so many points that severing his multiple connections was next to impossible. But one in love was already focused and totally concentrated upon a single point.

Taking this concept too far was not without risk, for it might have invited a desire to free oneself from and set oneself above the laws of the *shariah*, which were necessary to bind society together. Perhaps Jami himself had realized this danger for in his later days he moderated his views.

Khwaja Baqi Billah

The conquest of India by Babur in 1526 gave a considerable impetus to the development of the Naqshbandi order. Both the new emperor and a large number of his Central Asian soldiers were the spiritual followers of the disciples of Ubaidullah Ahrar. Some eminent Naqshbandiya Sufis followed the military in their move from Central Asia to India. However, during the reign of Humayun the Naqshbandis lost some of their royal patronage, for Humayun favoured a local Sufi lineage called the Shattariya. This changed once again in favour of the Naqshbandis with the ascendance of Akbar.

The organizer of the order in India was Khwaja Baqi Billah (1563-1603), who was seventh in the line of succession from Khwaja Bahauddin Naqshband, its founder. Baqi Billah was born in Kabul, which was then a part of the Mughal Empire with Mirza Muhammad Hakim, a younger brother of Akbar, acting as the viceroy. As dictated by the tradition, Baqi Billah first studied the religious sciences with the eminent *ulama* of Kabul

and then, unsatisfied with the knowledge of the learned, travelled to Central Asia to study under the Sufis. Thereafter, he returned to Kabul and from there went on to India. He visited Lahore, Delhi, Sambhal (in present day UP), and then retraced his steps to Lahore from where he proceeded to Kashmir. His search for spiritual truth took him back to Central Asia where he met many Sufis of Balkh and Badakhshan. The turning point of his life, however, seems to have taken place at Amkina, near Samarqand, where he was received by Khwajagi Amkinagi (d.1600), a spiritual descendant of Khwaja Nasiruddin Ubaidullah Ahrar.

It is said that one night Baqi Billah saw Khwaja Amkinagi in a dream saying to him: ‘O son! We are waiting for you. Come soon and wipe off the pangs of separation.’⁸ Receiving the call, Baqi Billah went to him and was accepted as his spiritual disciple. The Khwaja appears to have exerted powerful spiritual influence on Baqi Billah, for the latter was not only re-invigorated by the meeting, but also decided, on the advice of the Shaykh, to return to India. It is said that the other disciples of the Shaykh were jealous of him and the attention bestowed on him by their master. But they were silenced by the remark that Baqi Billah was already a perfect Sufi before presenting himself to the Shaykh, who only stabilized his spiritual condition without having to start from the very beginning. The Shaykh appointed him his *khalifah*.

Once back in India, Baqi Billah travelled as far as Delhi and then settled in its vicinity, in Ferozabad, on the banks of the Jamuna. He spent barely four years there before death overtook him.

⁸ *Hazirat ul Quds*, p..231, quoted from Zahurul Hassan Sharib, *The Sufi Saints of the Indian Subcontinent*, Delhi, 2006 (*Hazirat ul Quds* is a work by a disciple of Ahmad Sirhindi, Shaykh Badruddin bin Ibrahim Sirhindi – d. 1610 — of which the first volume is dedicated to the biographies of the earlier Naqshbandi saints up to Baqi Billah, while the second volume deals exclusively with Ahmad Sirhindi).

Guided by the recommendations of Khwaja Ubaydullah Ahrar that the Sufis should keep in touch with the rulers so as to act on behalf of the underprivileged, Baqi Billah too gave his attention equally to the common men and the nobles. This approach had a two-fold benefit. First of all, bringing the rulers close to the spirit of religion would induce them to reform themselves, thus making them better rulers, which would in turn benefit the common man. Secondly, the rulers would then support the religious and spiritual leaders, and thus the latter would be able to work more effectively. It was in such terms that he conveyed the message of the order to all – to religious scholars, spiritual leaders, government officials and nobles. His efforts succeeded to such a great extent that he attracted talented disciples like Nawab Murtaza Khan, a political figure, Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi, a Sufi and Shaykh Abdul Haqq Dehlawi, a religious scholar. All were men of great calibre.

Khwaja Baqi Billah had a pleasing personality and people were drawn to him. They found peace and spirituality in his company. His speech and conversation were so eloquent that people were moved by his words and, within a period of just 3 or 4 years, a large number of them entered his fold.

The Khwaja, like other Sufis, ran a big *khanqah*, where the trainees were allowed to stay. There they received not only food but also, if needy, a stipend to cover their basic needs. However, hospitality was extended for only three days to those who were not Sufis in training. The Khwaja believed that there were two basic conditions his followers-at-large should satisfy before spiritual guidance be given to them: they must have a lawful source of earning their livelihood as well as full faith in him as their spiritual guide. He also laid great emphasis on purity of character, which was for him a prerequisite for embracing *tasawwuf* and developing a spiritually

attuned personality. Once satisfied that these conditions were fulfilled, he exerted himself on his followers behalf, calling upon them to purify their souls.

Khwaja Baqi Billah believed in the doctrine of *wahdat al wujud*, 'the oneness of being', as propounded by Ibn 'Arabi and taught by the followers of Shaykh Ubaidullah Ahrar. However, Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi, the most famous *khalifah* of the Khwaja, did not accept this concept and became one of its staunch opponents.

Khwaja Baqi Billah breathed his last when he was barely forty, but by then he had already successfully launched the Naqshbandi spiritual movement in India. His personal achievements during such a short period of time were truly amazing. He left behind him worthy successors who could make full use of the opportunities created by him to spread the order further.

Khwaja Ubaydullah, the eldest son of Khwaja Baqi Billah and popularly known as Khwaja Kalan, wrote a book titled *Mablagh al Rijal* ('Perfection of Men'), which dealt with religious sects in India and Persia. Khwaja Khurd, a younger son, who studied under Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi, the most eminent disciple of Baqi Billah, wrote a treatise titled *Talim-i-Salik* ('Instruction of the Traveller upon the Path'). This book contained guidelines for entrants to the Sufi path.

The disciples of Baqi Billah included Ahmad Sirhindi, Shaykh Tajuddin of Sambhal, Khwaja Husamuddin Ahmad and Shaykh al Haddad.

Khwaja Husamuddin Ahmad

Khwaja Husamuddin Ahmad (1569-1633) was born in the town of Qunduz to one of Akbar's courtiers, Qazi Nizamuddin Badakhshi. His father

migrated to Agra when he was five years old. He grew up in the midst of the worldly luxuries that were part of courtly life and entered the imperial service. However, his heart was not in it and it is said that he often lapsed into an ecstatic state while performing his duties. Finally, he decided to renounce the world in favour of a life of spirituality. He distributed his possessions and went to Delhi to Khwaja Baqi Billah, became his disciple, serving him and his family till his last breath.

After his mentor's death, he devoted himself to running the *khanqah* in Ferozabad and looking after the family of the Sheikh, without involving himself in the controversy over the succession. He believed in the *wahadat al wujud* concept as propounded by Khwaja Baqi Billah and his other Ahrari pirs, and showed no interest in the *wahadat al shuhud* concept developed by Ahmad Sirhindi. The Ferozabadi (Delhi) branch of the Naqshbandi *silsila*, which followed the *wahdat al wujud* and also the practice of *sama'* remained distinct from and independent of the Sirhindi branch as established by Ahmad Sirhindi, which was opposed to both the above practices. Among later followers of the Ferozabadi branch were the famous Shah Waliullah as well as his father.

Khwaja Kalan, Baqi Billah's son, writes in his biography of Khwaja Husamuddin, that he preferred a life of seclusion and did not like to meet the nobles and rich men, unless there was some real need to do so. He is credited with building a mausoleum over the grave of his *pir*. Having cultivated a small garden adjacent to the tomb of Khwaja Baqi Billah, he would spend most of his time there, engrossed in meditation or praying and reciting the Qur'an.. He died in 1633 in Agra and was buried there but later his earthly remains were transferred to Delhi and buried in a grave by the side of his *pir*.

Shaykh Tajuddin Sambhali

Shaykh Tajuddin Sambhali (d. 1642) was perhaps the first disciple of Khwaja Baqi Billah, having entered his fold during his visit to Sambhal. When Baqi Billah returned to India and settled in Ferozabad, he visited him often, though he continued to reside in Sambhal. After Baqi Billah's death, he was eclipsed by the fame of Ahmad Sirhindi. Subsequently he went to Arabia, where he spent most of his life, the remainder of that period being spent in Egypt. He made a number of disciples and spread the order far and wide both in Arabia and Egypt. He wrote a number of books and translated several books from Arabic.

Shaykh Tajuddin's great success was mostly due to the fact that Shaykh Muhammad 'Ilan (d. 1622), a famous saint and ascetic associated with Haram (the Kabah), was interested in the Naqshbandi order and became his disciple. Even the Governor of Basra came under his influence. Shaykh Tajuddin ultimately bought a tract of land near the Sacred Mosque and stayed there for the rest of his life. He died at the age of 99 and was buried in Makkah.

Shaykh Abdul Haqq Muhaddith

Shaykh Abdul Haqq Muhaddith (1551-1642) of Delhi was one of the most eminent disciples of Khwaja Baqi Billah, though he was also initiated into the Qadri order.⁹ Basically a scholar, he concentrated on academic work. Having developed a special interest in the traditions of the Prophet, he devoted his entire life to studying and propagating the authentic traditions. He not only taught at the seminary, but also wrote about sixty books on a number of religious themes.

As far as the history of Sufism on the subcontinent is concerned, his

⁹ See the chapter on the Qadri order, where Abdul Haqq Muhaddith is also discussed

biographical dictionary of the Indian Sufis titled '*Akhbar al-Akhyar* ('The Annals of the Pious Men') is of the utmost importance.

Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi

Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi (1564-1624) was the most renowned of the disciples of Baqi Billah. Born in Sirhind, a town in Punjab, he was the son of Shaykh Abdul Ahad Makhdum. Shaykh Abdul Ahad was a man of religion and was fond of the company of devout Muslims. He was, moreover, a religious scholar, and taught his students not only the Qur'an, *hadith* and, *fiqh*, but also the books of *tasawwuf*. He followed the teachings of the Prophet to the letter. For this reason his mystical leanings led him to develop a special interest in the Naqshbandi order, for the Naqshbandis adhered strictly to the teachings of the Qur'an and the *sunnah*. It was but natural that Shaykh Ahmad should inherit this interest from his father.

In his early childhood Ahmad Sirhindi was given a proper religious education. First of all, he learnt the Qur'an by heart and studied at home under his father. After learning Arabic and Persian, and acquiring the basic knowledge of the religious sciences, he was sent to Sialkot to receive education under the guidance of Kamal Kashmiri and other *ulama*. Yaqub Kashmiri, a great scholar of *hadith*, was one of his teachers. By the age of 17 he had completed all the required courses and started teaching. Because of his scholarship he was invited to the court of Akbar and stayed in Agra for several years. There he met Abul Fazl and Faydi, and assisted them in their writings. Soon after he married the daughter of a noble named Shaykh Sultan of Thanesar.

In 1599, at the age of twenty-eight, after the death of his father, whose teaching was responsible for developing his spirituality and who initiated

him into a number of Sufi *silsilas*, Ahmed Sirhind travelled to Delhi and visited Khwaja Baqi Billah. The Khwaja recognized his spiritual potential at a glance and expressed a great interest in him. On his part, Ahmad Sirhindi perceived the excellence of the Khwaja's spiritual attainments and decided to become his disciple. The Khwaja gave him his full attention and it did not take Ahmad Sirhindi more than a few months to complete his training in the Naqshbandi order. Thereafter, he was appointed by the Shaykh as his *khalifah* and presented with a *khirqa* (gown) as a symbol of having completed his spiritual training.

The initiation into the Naqshbandi order was an event of major importance in his life. His religious outlook was transformed and he became convinced that the Naqshbandi discipline was the shortest, the fastest, and the only way to the ultimate pinnacle of spiritual achievement. This was because the Naqshbandi Shaykh shared his advanced stage of spiritual development with his disciples who were just setting out on their spiritual journey. This sharing set the beginners on the fast track to spiritual attainment.

Feeling himself well provided with spiritual sustenance, Shaykh Ahmad returned to Sirhind and began disseminating his *pir's* teachings. Imbued with a sense of purpose, he devoted himself to the cause of God, guiding and reforming his fellow men to the best of his ability. To this end he built a mosque and a large residence (*haveli*) to serve as the centre of his activities. He chose different ways of communicating his message — conversation, meetings, sermons, letters, books, etc. His greatest concern was the miserable state of Muslim society, which, vitiated by un-Islamic practices, followed religion in the letter but not in the spirit. In his view, this situation was due to mixing freely with non-Muslims and the consequent degeneration of the

Islamic way of life. This state of affairs needed to be corrected and Islamic spirituality restored to its pristine position.

Four years after his first visit, Ahmad Sirhindi went again to Delhi to meet Khwaja Baqi Billah and was received by the Shaykh with great respect and honour. The Khwaja listened to his account of mystical experience with great appreciation and treated him as a great mystic in his own right. By the time he went back to Sirhind his fame had spread far and wide and his spiritual attainments were recognized even by the Qadria order. He had a *khirqa* bestowed upon him by Sayyid Sikandar Qadri, a descendant of Abd al Qadir Jilani. This giving of recognition to the spiritual attainment of someone associated with another order was an extraordinary gesture on the part of the Qadri order.

In 1603-04, Shaykh Ahmad paid his third visit to his *pir*, Khwaja Baqi Billah, who on this occasion gave him even greater recognition. The Khwaja went so far as to say, “Ahmad has guided us to the true interpretation of Sufi pantheism. In the knowledge of mysticism he is like the sun, while we are like the planets revolving around him.”

Soon after the death of Khwaja Baqi Billah, the Khwaja’s followers acknowledged Shaykh Ahmad as the head of the Naqshbandi order in India. People in general regarded him as a *mujaddid*, a reformer of Islam. That is why his lineage came to be known as the Naqshbindiya—Mujaddadiya. His mission, which he perceived as willed by God, was to purge Islam of all sorts of un-Islamic practices as well as heresies that gained ground with his Muslim contemporaries. In these he included Akbar’s man-made religion, *din-i ilahi*.

The budding intellectual movements in Akbar’s court and the freedom with which such issues as prophethood, miracles, sainthood and the ways of

gaining knowledge of God were openly discussed seriously annoyed Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi. To uphold the dignity of the orthodoxy he wrote *Isbat al Nubuwah* ('The Proofs of the Prophecy') vindicating the orthodox stand and condemning those who thought themselves free to discuss the subject.

The other object of his reformist attention was Shiism. During the rule of Akbar's son Jahangir, the Shias gained great influence. Asif Jah, a Shia, who was Noor Jahan's brother and thus a brother-in-law of the Emperor, was the Prime Minister. He was incensed by Shaykh Ahmad's religious movement on two counts: one, Ahmad's success in bringing leading court officials into his fold and, second, his resistance to Shia influence in the State, through his writings. One of his works was titled *Radd-e-Rawafiz* ('The Rejection of The Shia Heretical Tenets'). When his influence began to have a serious effect on the court, Asif Jah became determined to nip the new movement in the bud, and soon succeeded in convincing the emperor that it posed great danger to the state.

Rulers never tolerate popular movements on the rise and Jahangir was no exception. On the advice of Asif Jah, the first step he took was to transfer the court officials who had come under the influence of Shaykh Ahmad. Of these Khan-i-Khanan was sent to Daccan; Sayyed Sadar Jahan to Bengal; Khan-i-Jahan to Malwa and Mahabat Khan to Kabul. Once the court was cleared of Ahmad Sirhindi's supporters, he was summoned to the court, where he presented himself along with some of his followers. When he came into the presence of the Emperor Jahangir, he refused to bow before him. When he was urged to observe the court etiquette, he replied that it was against the tenets of Islam to bow one's head to any of God's creatures. This audacity in the presence of the Emperor aggravated the situation and resulted in his imprisonment in the Fort of Gwalior.

Shaykh Ahmad was released from his enforced captivity after one year, but was asked to remain in the custody of the army for another two years. Being a missionary, he exploited every opportunity to introduce to his fellow detainees as well as the soldiers he came into contact with the true picture of Islam. A number of non-Muslims converted to Islam under his guidance.

For three or four years he travelled extensively along with the army, during which period he continued his *dawah* activities. He carried on, for example, writing letters to a number of different people, which were intended to bring them closer to the real face of Islam. These letters show his great concern for the revival of the faith. He believed that it was possible for a true Muslim to share in God's blessings in this world as well as in the Hereafter solely by following the *sunnah*. He succeeded in his efforts to bring not only common men but also nobles and courtiers into his fold, and was to see the influence of these nobles help change even the emperor's attitude.

When Ahmad Sirhindi became physically weak and felt that the hour of his death was drawing near, he took the king's permission to leave for Sirhind. Soon after he died at the age of 63 in 1624 and was buried in Sirhind.

Shaykh Ahmad is called *Mujaddid*, or 'The Reviver', because he believed himself to be called to revive Islam. This was to be done by purifying it of all the anti-Islamic practices prevalent among Indian Muslims as a result of indigenous influences. Indeed, Akbar's liberal religious policy aggravated the situation to the point where people did not hesitate to indulge in un-Islamic practices. That was why Shaykh Ahmad felt it necessary to take bold steps to purge society of these elements. His method of bringing about a religious renaissance was far-sighted and he had a remarkable

capacity for organization. To achieve his ends, he imparted training to his disciples and then sent them off to different regions to propagate the true teachings of Islam

His focused thinking resulted in his concept of *wahdat al shuhud*, which is considered to be his greatest contribution to the theoretical expositions of *tasawwuf*. This concept was worked out as a logical proposition grounded in the orthodox Qur'anic understanding of *tawhid*. His aim was to bring *tasawwuf* more in line with the teachings of the Qur'an and the *hadith*, for he felt it came dangerously close to yogic practices and Vedanta philosophy. To this end, he strove to harmonize Sufi teachings with the *shariah* and his efforts were certainly rewarded. The correction of practices labelled un-Islamic was a side effect of his striving. Thus, he admonished people to follow the straight and narrow path of orthodoxy. Innovations (*bidat*) were looked upon with disfavour. Listening to music, dancing and worshipping the saints, practices common in the then Muslim society, were forbidden to his followers, who successfully carried out the reforms outlined by him.

In his times, under the influence of Vedanta philosophy and Ibn 'Arabi's doctrines of 'the oneness of being', the mystics adopted the concept that God and the universe were, in essence, one and co-eternal, and that the universe was not the manifestation of the attributes of God, but the Reality Himself made manifest as the universal consciousness. The world was identified with God. Ibn 'Arabi held that there was no existence save the existence of God. God was both the Ruler and the ruled, the Creator and created. The world was the result of the manifestation of God and not a creation of God. To Ibn 'Arabi, the mystical union did not amount to 'becoming' one with God, rather it was the realization of a union that already existed. This was also the concept of God in Vedic philosophy. In the Vedic view of life everything was God, and of the same essence.

Such a concept, according to Ahmad Sirhindi, was not compatible with

the teachings of Islam. According to the scriptures, the world was created by the will of God and was also sustained by God. Man too was created and sustained by this same God. Only God was the Eternal Reality. Everything else was ephemeral. Thus the concept of *wahdat ul wajud*, which had become popular among the Sufis, had no basis in the Qur'an and the *hadith*. In fact the Qur'an says: 'And call not, besides Allah, on another god. There is no God but Him. Everything (that exists) will perish except Himself.' (28:88)

From this position Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi criticized this theory of *wahdat ul wajud* or 'the oneness of being' in which Ibn 'Arabi proposed that God and the world were one. Ahmad Sirhindi held this to be untrue: the world was not one with God, but proceeded from God; the existence of God was real, while the existence of the world was unreal and imaginary; the universe was not God, but the Shadow of God. This concept which he called *wahdat ash-shuhud* or 'the unity/oneness of witnessing', the Shaykh felt, was entirely in consonance with the unity of God or *tawhid*, which was the cornerstone of Islam. In Islam, God is One and Indivisible, an Absolute Whole. The Creator and the created are separate. The world exists and it is other than God. He explains his concept by a simile: "The presence of the world is like the presence of the image of an object in a mirror. Thus the presence of the image is not the existence of the object. The object is real, but the image is unreal. The existence of the image is a shadow existence (*Wujud Zilli*) totally separate from the real existence (*Wujud Asli*) of the object. In this way the existence of the world is a shadow existence, separate from the real existence of God."

Wahdat ash-shuhud also means 'unity of vision', that is to say, the experience of union or oneness is related to vision rather than reality. This addressed the experience of the Sufis of 'becoming one with God.' The experience of union, said Ahmad Sirhindi, did not mean that man became one with God. In reality, the servant shall remain the servant forever. After explaining

this concept, Shaykh Ahmad concludes: “May God save us from their blasphemous ideas.”

Shaykh Ahmad’s description of his personal spiritual experience was unparalleled in its great clarity and precision. Khaliq Ahmad Nizami writes: ‘Shaykh Ahmad’s clarity of thought invested the world of spiritual experience with a touch of realism which was unique.’ Drawing on this experience, Shaykh Ahmad put forward his ideas so forcefully that the doctrine of *wahdat ash shuhud* was accepted not only by his disciples but also by others who were not associated with the order.

Shaykh Ahmad laid the utmost emphasis on the observance of the *shariah*, for, in some other orders, the *shariah* came to be relegated to a secondary position. He also boldly criticized all the innovations (*bidat*), which were not compatible with the teachings of the Qur’an and the *hadith* as has been mentioned earlier. For example, he did not hesitate to oppose Akbar’s attempt to evolve a new religion combining the teachings of different religions. In any case, Akbar’s endeavours failed even in his own times for, except for a tiny minority, no one was willing to convert to this man-made religion; Akbar’s subjects did not even fear his displeasure on account of their recalcitrance.

Shaykh Ahmad succeeded in putting an end to the influence of *din-i ilahi* by approaching the Mughal nobles in Akbar’s court. He wrote letters to them encouraging them to take an active stand in this matter. Ultimately, Nawab Murtaza Khan and Shaykh Farid succeeded in persuading Jahangir to defend the law of Islam. Aurangzeb, for his part, had great respect for the Naqshbandi saints. In fact, he had received his spiritual instruction from the sons of Shaykh Ahmad.

Shaykh Ahmad believed that a truly faithful Sufi would never transgress the law or the *shariah*. He criticized the *ulama* for doing nothing but issuing *fatwas* (religious decrees), and for taking no pains to effect the internal

purification which was necessary for receiving divine inspiration. Shaykh Ahmad, moreover, did not spare those Sufis who indulged in senseless wrangling. The Shaykh and other Naqshbandi saints, as well as disapproving of music and dance to induce ecstasy, also did not like the loud utterance of God's name, for when God was as close to us as our jugular vein as the Qur'an said, what was the point of loud recitation? Shaykh Ahmad writes in one of his letters: "with the Naqshbandi Sufis, guidance and discipline depend upon one's submission to and acknowledgement of the prophetic institution. It has nothing to do with external trappings such as the cap or the genealogy of the Shaykh."¹⁰

Here is yet another excerpt from Shaykh Ahmad's letters, published under the title *Maktubat-e-Mujaddid*:

"The mysticism of the Sufis and their relations and inspirations are to be accepted only if they conform to the *shariah*; otherwise they are to be rejected... An abundance of miracles is not a sign of spiritual superiority... The real miracle of the saintly men is the purification of the souls of their disciples. The soul being immaterial, they have to turn their attention away from materialism. The distinction between a true and a false devotee is that the former adheres strictly to the *shariah*, while the latter adheres to his own whims and fancies... Submission to the Prophet's tradition is the real bliss."

The Successors of Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi

Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi's family adopted his religious mission with total zeal and fervour. He was blessed with four sons: Muhammad Sadiq, Muhammad Said, Muhammad Masum and Muhammad Yahya. Not only his sons but also a number of his grandsons involved themselves in this task of religious revival.

¹⁰ Maktubat-e-Mujaddid, book I, letter 221

Khwaja Muhammad Masum (1599-1668) worked very hard for the mission and it is recorded that he had 900,000 disciples. This figure may not be accurate, but there is no doubt that he was very popular. A large number of his disciples accompanied him on *hajj* in 1657. His son Muhammad Ubaydullah recorded his spiritual experiences during *hajj*.

Khwaja Muhammad Masum worked along the same lines as his father. He would often apply Shaykh Ahmad's teachings to new situations, which is the task of a *mujtahid*. Like his father, he preached that innovations should be uncompromisingly eradicated and the purity of the *sunnah* maintained by the Sufis. In his times some of the Sufis, in order to gain popularity, refrained from criticizing people for un-Islamic acts. Khwaja Masum in one of his letters writes that such an approach is sinful for Sufis because they are duty-bound to guide the people along the right path. He writes: "The Naqshbandi saints strictly adhere to the ways of the Prophet. Those who refrain from enjoining people to do good and forbid evil have deviated from the path of our order. . . . Had God approved of non-interference with the people, He would not have sent the prophets." Then he goes on to enumerate a number of great Sufis, including Ibn 'Arabi, who admonished people for their wrong actions.¹¹

Khwajah Muhammad Masoom claimed to be the *qayyum* of the age (*qayyum* in the Naqshbandi order denotes one who is to shoulder the responsibility of bringing stability, reform and resurgence in his own times). Shaykh Ahmad claimed this title for himself and mentioned in one of his letters that the role of *qayyum* would devolve upon his son Muhammad Masum.¹² His movement was indeed of a missionary nature and mobilized the people not only in India but also abroad. Its promoters appointed their *khalifah* and sent them to far-off places to spread their message. The fame of the Naqshbandi saints having reached distant lands, seekers of

¹¹ *Maktubat Khwajah Muhammad Masum Sirhindi*

¹² *Maktubat Rabbani*, Vol. 3, letter 104

enlightenment in turn came to India and received spiritual training under their guidance.

The order found fertile soil in far away lands as well. One Maulana Murad (d. 1720), who belonged to Bhukhara, came to India to receive spiritual training under Khwaja Muhammad Masum. After completing this spiritual course, he went to Damascus. There he found great support, not only of the people but also of the king. Maulana Murad's disciples established a number of schools there.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Naqshbandi order in India gained so many converts that it was able to exert a great influence in the intellectual field and also improve its own internal organization. Amongst its eminent followers were: Shah Waliullah (1703-1762), Khwaja Mir Dard (1721-1785), Mirza Mazhar Jan-i Janan (1700-1781), Shah Abdul Aziz (1746-1824), Sayyed Ahmad Shahid (1786-1831), Shah Ghulam Ali (1743-1824) and Maulana Khalid Kurdi (b. 1776).

Shah Waliullah made it his mission to work for the moral and spiritual regeneration of Muslim society and succeeded in bringing about an intellectual renaissance. Like Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi, Shah Waliullah considered Islam to be a complete code of life, offering guidance at both individual and social levels. Feeling that no one could realize his potential unless he developed faith in God, he believed that Islam provided the best opportunity for man's self-realization. He believed that if man received the right guidance, his spiritual evolution went on forever. Death to him was only a turning point, and not the end of the journey. He thus developed a comprehensive philosophy of the growth of the human soul through mystical experiences.

Shah Waliullah, being an authority on the *hadith* and *tafsir*, made a great academic contribution. His most valued book, *Hujjat Allah al Balighah*, is still widely studied. It has been translated, in part and also in its entirety,

into several languages, including French. Despite great opposition, Shah Waliullah also translated the Qur'an into Persian — a formidable service on his part. In India, Persian was the language of educated Muslims and non-Muslims alike and they benefited greatly from this translation. His son, Shah Rafiuddin, a religious scholar, translated the Qur'an into Urdu to bring it within the reach of the common man.

Khwaja Mir Dard was a famous Urdu poet who was a committed Sufi with half a dozen treatises explaining his views on Sufism and Islam to his credit.

Mirza Mazhar Jan-i-Janan engaged in activities, which were confined solely to the spiritual spheres, unlike Shah Waliullah and his family, who were involved in diverse activities—academic, spiritual and political. Mirza Mazhar Jan-i-Janan had a number of Afghan disciples. He wanted to spread his mission to the non-Muslims as well, and it was perhaps to bring them closer that he declared the Vedas to be a revealed book.

Shah Ghulam Ali was Mirza Mazhar's chief disciple. His fame spread far and wide. People from Abyssinia, Syria, Asia Minor and Afghanistan came to him for their spiritual regeneration.

Khalid Kurdi of Damascus, a notable disciple of Shah Ghulam Ali, also played an important role in the spiritual life of his country.

The Naqshbandi order became so popular in Turkey that about 52 *takiyas* (hospices) were founded in Istanbul alone. The Naqshbandis made the *madrassa* and the mosque their centres. For instance, Madrasa Al-Abbasiyya was an active centre of Naqshbandi activity in Baghdad.

The revival of Naqshbandi order in Turkey, Afghanistan, Central Asia and in many other places besides India shows the success of the efforts made by the order to bring about the spiritual regeneration of people in almost every part of the world.

The Firdausi Order

The Origin of the Order

The Firdausi order traces its origins to Najmuddin Kubra (d 1221) through his disciple, Saifuddin Sa'id Bakharzi (d. 1260). Najmuddin Kubra's *pirs* (spiritual mentors) were all either companions or disciples of Abu Najib Suhrawardi (d. 1168), the spiritual founder of the Suhrawardi *silsila* and for this reason the Kubrawiya and the Firdausiya are considered to be collateral lines of the Suhrawardiya.

Najimuddin Kubra called his disciple Saifuddin Bakharzi, 'The Shaykh of Paradise', and hence his spiritual lineage is known as Firdausi. Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya narrates the story of Bakharzi's conversion to Sufism. In his youth Shaykh Bakharzi was opposed to Sufism, going to the extent of condemning the Sufis publicly in his lectures. Once Shaykh Bakharzi was delivering a lecture full of venom against Sufism, with Shaykh Najmuddin Kubra part of the audience. He never even once contradicted the speaker but while leaving the mosque, he asked, 'Where is that Sufi?' meaning Bakharzi. At this Barkhazi fell down at his feet and became his disciple. After giving him spiritual training, Shaykh Najmuddin sent him to Bhukhara, where he died in 1260.

However, before he died he sent one of his disciples, Khwaja Badruddin of Samarqand, to settle in Delhi and propagate the spiritual message in India. He arrived in Delhi at a time when Khwaja Qutbuddin Bakhtiar Kaki was already settled there. Khwaja Badruddin maintained good relations

with the Chishti Sufis and became great friends with Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya.

Like the Chishtis, Khwaja Badruddin was also very fond of *sama'*, so he often came to meet Shaykh Nizamuddin and participate in *sama'* gatherings. He became immensely popular and had large number of followers. He resided in Delhi for several decades and lived to a ripe old age. He died some time during the reign of Alauddin Khalji. He was succeeded by his two *khalifas*, Khwaja Ruknuddin and Khwaja Najibuddin.

Khwaja Najibuddin Firdausi led the quiet life of an ascetic and was not personally very popular. It was his disciples who spread his message far and wide. One of them, Fariduddin, compiled a book on *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) called *Fatawa-i-Tatarkhania*, named after Tatar Khan, a nobleman associated with the court of Sultan Firoz Shah Tughlaq. Tatar Khan was a great patron of learning and gave his support to the scholars. However, his most outstanding disciple was Shaykh Sharafuddin Ahmad Yahya Maneri.

Sharafuddin Maneri

Shaykh Sharafuddin Ahmad Yahya Maneri (d. 1381) was the best-known saint of this order. He came from Bihar, his ancestors having settled there in the 13th century. He received a traditional education, which included the study of grammar and language. However, he did not have any religious education, an omission that he later often regretted. When he was about 15 years old, he met Shaykh Sharafuddin Abu Tawwama. His coming into contact with a great religious scholar was a God-sent opportunity for him.

Shaykh Sharafuddin Abu Tawamma was originally from Bhukhara and was very well educated. He came to Delhi during the reign of Sultan Balban

but it seems that the local *ulama* became jealous of his popularity, forcing him to leave Delhi. On his way to Sunargaon in Bengal, he stopped at Maner. The visit of a religious scholar of the calibre of Abu Tawwama was indeed a blessing for Sharafuddin Ahmad. He kept company with Abu Tawwama, accompanied him to Sunargaon and even took to living with his family in order to receive religious education from him. Soon Sunargaon became a popular centre of Islamic learning.

After hearing the news of the death of his father, Shaykh Yahya, in 1291, Sharafuddin Ahmad left Sunargaon and returned to Maner to be with his mother. From there he travelled to Delhi and visited Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya. However, he was not initiated by him. Thereafter he went to Panipat and met Abu Ali Qalandar. But the latter was perpetually in a state of religious ecstasy, and was therefore unable to become his teacher. It was then that he came into contact with Shaykh Najibuddin Firdausi. He became his disciple and was given written authority to enroll his own disciples in turn. He objected to this, saying that he did not feel adequately qualified. To this his pir, Sheikh Najibuddin, answered that his decision was based on divine inspiration, and he commanded Shaykh Sharafuddin Ahmad to return to Maner.

One of his devotees, Maulana Nizam Madni, a disciple of Nizamuddin Auliya, built a *khanqah* for him in Maner. Subsequently, Sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq had a great *khanqah* built for the Shaykh and assigned him some land to provide for its needs. This *khanqah* became a meeting place for the common man as well as for religious scholars and Sufis.

A great scholar, Sharafuddin Maneri made a profound study of theological and mystical subjects and was capable of discussing issues pertaining to either area with equal ease. He wrote a number of books which are today

regarded as great contributions to Sufism. His religious stance is further clarified in lectures where he often used anecdotes to illustrate his points.

He was a great letter-writer and in one of his letters he advised Sultan Firoz to be impartial in dispensing justice, for justice was an attribute of God. Referring to a *hadith* of the Prophet, he advised his followers that an hour spent in pursuing justice was far superior to forty years of worship.¹ He held the view that a Sufi must be merciful and generous to others. He should feed others, even if he were to go hungry himself. He should make do with the minimum of clothing in order to clothe others, and patiently suffer any cruelty or injustice meted out to him. Neither should he retaliate when provoked. He should rather answer abuses with blessings. He held that a true Sufi should necessarily be sympathetic to everyone, just as the sun shines on enemies and friends alike.

A Sufi must have no attachment with the world and, moreover, should entertain no feelings of self-righteousness. He should be modest and humble, for humility was essential to the achievement of success in the Sufi path. He taught his followers to assist their fellow-men wholeheartedly. He said that acts of kindness and assistance given to the needy were more meritorious than prayers and fasting. Even prophets of God went out of their way to help people in need. Although he was an ascetic and did not believe in establishing contacts with rulers or others in authority, when it came to helping people in need, he would send letters of recommendation to officials, if he thought that his letters could alleviate their sufferings. He often narrated the tradition of the Prophet that a Muslim was one from whose hands and tongue people were safe.

¹ *Maktubat Shaykh Sharafuddin Maneri*

He even went to the extent of saying that the heart of a sincere Muslim was the home of God. One who broke a Muslim's heart destroyed the house of God. He believed that the *nafs* (ego) was the real source of all evil, so Muslims were duty-bound to wage a war against the baser sides of human nature; the real war was to be waged not against non-Muslims but against the heretical *nafs* (ego).

Shaykh Sharafuddin believed in the necessity of ascetic exercises for the development of the spiritual self. He maintained that the performance of these exercises endowed devotees with supernatural powers, which in turn enabled them to receive divine inspiration. He explained in one of his letters that *tajrid* or solitude meant complete severance from all worldly things, and entailed giving away everything one possessed. He explained *tafrid*, or renunciation, as breaking away from oneself. This meant an absence of concern for the future and total freedom from all anxiety. He said that there were two aspects of 'solitude': one was external separation from the world, and the other was an internal separation in which the heart was purified of any thoughts other than those of God.

He believed that the observance of the *shariah* was essential for the spiritual life of a *salik*, for the teachings enshrined in the *shariah* were based on divine revelation. Firstly, one had to believe in divine unity and, secondly, in obedience to God.

He believed in the notion that the purification of clothes at prayer times had a symbolic meaning: that is, the cleansing of the human heart of the impurities of human weaknesses. And this is what was highlighted in the path of the *tariqa*. Similarly, the performance of ablutions before prayers denoted the importance of remaining in a permanent state of cleanliness. Facing the *qibla* at prayer times amounted to directing prayers from the heart to

God. Thus, he felt that the *shariah* and the *tariqa* were complementary to one another and led to *haqiqa*. He believed that it was religion that guided the spiritual journey from this material world to the celestial world. To him, the *shariah* and *tariqa* were essential concomitants of the spiritual life: the *shariah* was the body and the *tariqa* was the soul. Although the higher stages in this journey can be made only by God's grace, God's grace can only be received by obeying the *sunnah* laid down by the Prophet Muhammad.

He condemned those misguided Sufis who believed that having achieved the realization of God, they no longer needed to say their obligatory prayers. The Shaykh made it clear that such was the path of Satan, who had refused to prostrate himself before Adam. However, he thought that the true Sufi who realized God was superior to a religious scholar who only had bookish knowledge. As far as the worldly *ulama* were concerned, they had to be shunned like the devil, for they had taken the place of the devil in misleading humanity.

Further, the Shaykh held that the disciples should single out the perfect guide to help them along their spiritual path. The absence of a guide would leave them directionless, and they would go astray. The spiritual journey could not be undertaken without the guidance of an experienced teacher to lead them along the path towards the realization of God.

Inspired by the ideas of Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi, Iraqi and Fariduddin Attar, Shaykh Sharafuddin believed in *wahdat al wujud*. He said that the *tawhid* of the *tariqa* was the highest state of the pursuit of the truth.² To him *tawhid* or *wahdat al wujud* was the final stage in the Sufi's journey to the

² Manaqib ul Asfiya, pp. 336-337

world of Unity, where he became the recipient of the divine light, absorbing its particles. This experience did not make him God. He did not cease to exist. It was just like looking through a mirror, where the mirror's existence is always evident and never in question. The state of receiving divine energy through the vision was called absorption in monotheism by the Sufis. Here, above all, the recipient had to have the humility to realize the need for divine grace

The Successors of Shaykh Sharafuddin Maneri

Shaykh Sharafuddin Maneri had a great following. Traditions say that his disciples numbered more than 100,000. Of these, Shaykh Muzaffar, Malikzada Fazluddin and Maulana Nizamuddin were the most prominent. A number of *khanqahs* were built in Bihar and Bengal and the spiritual teachings embodied in his letters spread almost all over the subcontinent within a short period of time.

Shaykh Muzaffar, whose ancestors came to Bihar from Balkh, received his education in Delhi where he also taught briefly in a seminary founded by Sultan Tughlaq. Ultimately, he returned to Bihar and became Shaykh Sharafuddin's disciple. The Shaykh put him through rigorous spiritual exercises. He underwent an ascetic regimen in the *khanqah* till he was reduced to mere skin and bones. The Shaykh was so impressed by his spiritual achievements that he was later excused from performing these exercises. Eventually he left the *khanqah*, but always remained in touch with the Shaykh. Their communication was often maintained through letters. After the death of Shaykh Sharafuddin, Shaykh Muzaffar set out for Makkah to perform *hajj* and lived there till his death.

Qadi Shamshuddin was another known disciple of Shaykh Sharafuddin.

Being an administrator in Chausa (Bihar) he did not have the time to attend the assemblies of his Shaykh. Therefore, the Shaykh used to write letters to him. These letters, running into hundreds, cover a wide range of topics related to Sufism - *tawhid*, *tawba* (repentance), miracles, revelation, inspiration, the shariah, *tariqa*, *haqiqa*, *dhikr*, etc. Other Sufis under training copied these letters and, in turn, spread further the message contained in them. Thus the Sufi philosophy of Sharafuddin Maneri soon spread all over north India.

There were several publications of Shaykh Sharafuddin's letters in the 19th and 20th centuries. These letters clearly show his preference for an ascetic life. He even criticized one of his disciples, Maulana Sadruddin, for having accepted the post of a deputy Qazi. To him it was nothing but a waste of time.

A disciple made a compilation of his collected discourses called *Ma'danul Ma'ani*. In these he discussed the religious and spiritual duties of Islam, and the social and ethical responsibilities of Muslims in relation to the verses of the Qur'an, the traditions of the Prophet, and the sayings of the Sufis.

The Teachings of Shaykh Maneri

As we learn from the letters of Shaykh Sharafuddin Yahya Maneri, the first stage for the *salik* or the wayfarer on the Path, is *tawba* or repentance. *Tawba*, he explains, consists of a sincere resolution to abstain from sins. It is *tawba* that turns man into a true believer.

As the spiritual path is beset with thorns, a *salik* requires a guide in order to follow it. 'When a novice begins to associate with a spiritual guide, he will have to spend three years in three types of training. If he stands firm in obeying these orders, he can then don the real garb of the seeker,

and not merely the conventional one. Unless this procedure is followed, experienced guides insist that the novice cannot be accepted into the Way. The three requirements are: one year's service on behalf of other people, one year devoted to God, and another year spent in watching over one's own heart.'³

Of the perfect guide he writes: 'It should be noted that the foundation of the qualifications and claims to rank of a shaykh or a religious leader rests in brief, on five supports. The first is the submission of servanthood common to our servants; the second is an aptitude to receive truths directly from God without any intermediary; the third is a submission distinguishable from the first submission by a very special grace; the fourth is the honour of receiving divine knowledge of God without any intermediary; and the fifth is the riches of receiving infused knowledge.'⁴

'Discipleship is a matter of wanting something from the heart. A sincere novice is one who resolves to be purified of all pleasures and self-interest.'⁵ Only such a person is capable of fixing his attention on God, the source of all knowledge. If a disciple wants to benefit from the spirituality of his master, he must surrender himself to him. The teacher is the channel for the transmission of blessing and mercy from heaven to earth.

The disciple can receive divine blessing only when he is able to fully detach himself from the world. To do that he must lose himself in the teacher. He has to cast off all his desires and follow the teacher in a mode of true submission. It is by submitting entirely to his teacher that he submits to his Lord. As we learn from the *hadith*, "One who obeys the Messenger obeys God."

³ letter 5: Searching for a spiritual guide in Letters from Maneri, tr. Paul Jackson, 1980, p. 29

⁴ letter 6: The Qualifications of a Sheikh, *ibid.*, p. 30

⁵ letter 7: Discipleship, *ibid.*, p. 34

In one of his letters Sharafuddin Maneri speaks of purity: 'The first step is to see that one's body, clothes, and food are pure and lawful. All one's senses should be purified of sin and rebellion. As for one's heart, it should be cleansed of all blameworthy qualities, such as avarice, jealousy, rancour and other similar things. When this first degree of purity has been achieved, then the disciple has taken a step forward on the path of religion; when the second degree of purity has been achieved, he has progressed, and with the third degree, has taken the three steps.'⁶

The essence of *tawba* is to turn the disciple from impurity to purity. The purity of the heart is the final stage in this spiritual journey. God becomes his constant guardian. He starts living under His ever-watchful eye.

In another letter Sharafuddin Maneri explains the difference between the *shariah* and the *tariqa*. The *shariah* purifies the heart, cleanses it of all moral evils like hypocrisy, avarice, greed and so on. The *shariah* or religion deals with external conduct and bodily purification, while the *tariqa* or path deals with the inner purification. The one is like matter or the body. The other is like the spirit or the soul.⁷

In letter 28th⁸, he writes of the importance of organizing one's day around the five prayers and spending time in the remembrance of God, reciting the Divine names and in repentance. Part of the time should be spent in the company of the master. In the evening, time should be set apart for introspection and reviewing the gains and losses incurred during the day in terms of spirituality. While going to bed one should continue recitations, and one should try to get up in the latter part of the night before dawn to perform *dhikr*.

⁶ Chapter 29: Purity, *ibid.*, pp. 115-116

⁷ Chapter 25: The Law and The Way; Chapter 26: The Law and the Truth, *ibid.*, pp.101-107

⁸ Chapter 28: Fixing Ones' Spiritual Routine from the Outset, *ibid.*, pp. 111-115

What he considers to be of the utmost importance in this spiritual path is the motive of the disciple. The motive is likened to the life in the body, and the significance of light to the eyes. Just as the body without life or the eye without light is useless, the acts of a disciple without a pure motive are as good as mere form. If desire and love of the world dominate the heart of a man, all his acts will be worldly, even acts of worship. If desire and love of heaven predominate in his heart, all his acts will be heavenly, even such acts as eating and sleeping.

Therefore, a disciple must attach importance to purifying his intentions. To be successful in this task he has to obey the instructions of his teacher.

In one of his letters the Shaykh speaks of man's love for God and signs that attest to it:

1. Being given to prayer and seclusion

2. Preferring the Divine Word to human words; the Divine Presence to the sight of man; the service of God to the service of the world; and not grieving for any loss save separation from Him.

3. Being full of humility. It has aptly been said: 'Humility is the messenger from God to man.' The seeker must get rid of his self-conceit and self-respect with asceticism and purification.

He holds knowledge to be as important for purification as ablution for prayer. Knowledge is of two kinds, one received from books and the other through inspiration.

The traveller on the divine path partakes of three states. 1. Action 2. Knowledge 3. Love. These can be negotiated by one who wishes to discover the truth with the help of a teacher. An experienced teacher instructs his disciple in accordance with his spiritual capacity.

Service is regarded as an essential duty for a disciple who wants to pursue this spiritual path. The gains of service are far superior to those of worship. Service kills the ego. It breeds humility and good behaviour. It destroys pride, impurity and illumines the soul. The sages have said that there are a number of ways to reach God, but the best and the shortest is that of service.

Renunciation of the world is necessary for the service of the Lord. The heart is one, it cannot be focused on two things at the same time—the world and the Lord. The final stage in renunciation consists of a complete indifference to the world. This expulsion of worldly desire from the mind is the most difficult task and therefore can be accomplished only with the help of the Divine Grace.

The separation of the heart from worldly cravings is superior to the separation of the body from worldly objects. Renunciation is the basis of all virtues and is the first condition of discipleship. Renunciation can be divided into three kinds. 1. Abstinence from what is forbidden by the scriptures. 2. Abstinence from over-indulgence in lawful pleasures. 3. Renunciation of that which separates man from God - this is the highest stage of renunciation.⁹

Purity of body as well as of mind is necessary at all times. Both are required for the Divine attraction to uplift the seeker to the highest stage. The gate to this path is knowledge and wisdom. Knowledge is the key to all virtues, as ignorance is the key to all vices. It is therefore obligatory for the seeker to seek knowledge and the company of the wise. True knowledge is that which leads to God. False knowledge is that which leads to wealth and worldly positions.

⁹ Chapter 75: Abandoning the World, *ibid.*, pp. 309-311

Like other Sufis, Sharafuddin Maneri believes that ‘mystical knowledge is the very essence of the souls of believers. Whosoever is not destined for this knowledge does not really exist.’¹⁰ ‘It is clear that mystical knowledge cannot be gained through the exercise of one’s intellect, unless it is granted by the Lord; the uninitiated may be highly intelligent and yet devoid of mystical knowledge. Nor can knowledge be obtained by hearing, unless the Lord grants it, for most unbelievers receive an invitation from the prophets and hear a description of this knowledge without ever acquiring it. It has been established that knowledge of the Lord is granted only through His guidance. Hence it is that Abu Bakr, the Righteous, said: “We recognize God by means of God, and other than God by the light of God.”’¹¹

¹⁰ Chapter 45: Mystical Knowledge of the Transcendent Creator, *ibid.*, p. 174

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 176.

The Sufi Concept of Meditation

Introduction: What Is Meditation?

The word meditation is today a much-used word describing a plethora of practices that are sometimes difficult to bring under one common denominator. Hence the need for a short introduction that will put the subject in its proper perspective. The context in which it is going to be discussed here is religious, and the religion discussed is Islam. Islam, like Judaism and Christianity, is a monotheistic religion, but there are other religions as well which might be described as polytheistic, for example, Hinduism or non-theistic, like Jainism or Buddhism, where meditation too is an accepted practice. Therefore, it is necessary to construct a definition of meditation that would do justice to the whole range of experiences taking place within different religious frames.

Meditation might indeed encompass an extremely broad array of practices connected to many of the world's religious and philosophical traditions, but there are certain traits that are common. These generally include refraining from random, disturbing thoughts and fantasies, and aim at calming and focusing the mind on some specific object. Sometimes meditation requires a strenuous effort, while at other times it is an entirely effortless activity experienced as 'just happening'. Different practices involve concentrating one's attention differently. A variety of positions and postures might be involved, for example, sitting cross-legged, standing, lying down, kneeling and walking. At times certain devices like prayer beads (the Islamic *tasbeih* and the Catholic *rosary*, for example), symbolic representations of the deity,

singing and dancing or even consumption of narcotic substances might be used to induce the right frame of mind.

The stated purpose of meditation varies almost as much as the practice itself. It is seen as a means of gaining experiential, that is, practical insight into the nature of reality, both in the case of religious and spiritually inclined persons as well as those who profess to follow no religion at all. It is perceived as an effective way of drawing closer or even becoming one with the Ultimate Reality, irrespective of what one might think it to be. Meditation thus requires and, therefore, develops the power of concentration, awareness, self-discipline and calmness of mind.

Let us touch briefly on some particular meditative practices and explain their basic mechanism. In the *samadhi* or *shamatha*, or concentrative techniques of meditation, the mind is kept closely focused on a particular word, image, sound, person or idea. This form of meditation is found in Buddhist and Hindu traditions including Yoga, as well as in medieval Christianity, the Jewish *Kabala* and some practices of the Sufis. Related to this method is a silent repetition of a memorized passage from the scripture or a particular word. *Dhikr*, or remembrance of God, would fall into this category. So would *simran* and *nam japna* of Sikhism.

In the *vipasana* (insight, or seeing things as they are) type of meditation, the mind is trained to notice each perception or thought that passes through it, but without “stopping” on any one. This is a characteristic form of meditation in Buddhism, especially Theravada and Zen, but does not seem to play much of a role in Islam.

In *annapana* meditation, attention is focused on breathing. The Sufis use this practice as well, and it is often alleged that they adopted it under the influence of Indian, both Hindu and Buddhist traditions.

As the concept and practice of meditation are assumed here to have, as their inspiration, religious and spiritually charged circumstances, it is important to briefly define the term religion itself. Religion can simply be described as a set of systems, which aims at bringing its follower to the source of Truth. Mostly, the religion would have at its centre a scripture, often divinely revealed (for example, the Qur'an in Islam), which would be then interpreted through theological writings over a period of time. But a religion also necessarily develops a practical arrangement actually enabling its followers to reach God or whatever other object/objects the religious practice revolves around. It has to have a practical way of worship, certain symbols and ideas, and a body of worshippers - a religious community. This community then allows an individual to integrate and lose himself within it, thus partaking in the means and ways the community has evolved of attaining reality and salvation.

One such way is meditation. But, as further scrutiny will reveal, meditation is very often linked to mysticism. Mysticism is a unique experience, invariably taking place in a religious context. The person experiencing it interprets this experience as an encounter with the ultimate divine reality. Further, this experience seems to be direct and cannot be explained in a rational way. It brings about a deep sense of unity and of living in a level of being other than the ordinary.¹

At times, and for some exceptional people, this experience can be gained in a natural and effortless way without any special endeavour on their part. Others, it eludes totally. But the human mind longs to reach the Ultimate

¹ A basic introduction to mysticism might be found in *Mysticism in the World's Religions* by Geoffrey Parrinder, Oneworld Publications, Oxford, 1976; and *Hindu and Muslim Mysticism*, R.C. Zaehner, Oneworld, Oxford, 1966.

and experience it at close quarters. This longing gives rise to the possibility of quest conceived of as a way. A way implies the existence of a wayfarer. Those who have travelled all the way become the possessors of special knowledge and may act as guides for the novices. In practical terms, they are the mentors or the teachers - Muslim *pirs* or *murshids*, Hindu or Sikh *gurus*, etc., in other words charismatic leaders who gather their followers around themselves and mediate their access to salvation. In certain cases, the scriptures can replace the need for a living guru (*Guru Granth* of Sikhism). Sometimes it is the tomb of the saint that serves as the focal point. It becomes a place of pilgrimage and the saint performs the same functions after death as were ascribed to him during his lifetime. He mediates and acts as a bridge between the believer and God. This is common both to Sufism as well as some branches of Christianity.

In short, meditation seems to be a way of gaining a glimpse into the ultimate reality through an extraordinary experience brought about by its practice. It is a phenomenon found in many diverse religious traditions.

Islamic Mysticism: *Tasawwuf*

The mystical trend in Islam is called *tasawwuf* and is an act of devoting oneself to a way of life aimed at achieving a mystical union with God. Broadly speaking, it can be described as an intensification of Islamic faith and practice.²

In general, Sufis have always looked upon themselves as true Muslims, who take most seriously God's call to find proof of His existence in His creation, that is, both in the world spread in front of them and the self. They talk about the importance of reconciling the *shariah* and the *tariqa*.

² For a brief introduction to the Islamic faith and practice see *Islam* by Farida Khanam, Goodword Books, New Delhi, 2001.

They lay stress on one's inner life, contemplation of one's actions, spiritual development and cultivation of the soul. They acknowledge the fact that God, both in His essence and His attributes, can be approached through faith alone, and this is the way of the majority of the faithful. However, they assume that there are also other ways of knowing Him and those are not open to all. Thus, He may be known through intellectual endeavour, which is the way of the philosophers, but this way certainly falls short of its goal. And He may be known through a direct experience (which the Sufis claim for themselves). The direct, mystical experience of God is the most fulfilling way of knowing Him. However, not everyone may travel this path. Only some are called to it and even fewer attain their goal. The Truth (*Al Haqq*³) is veiled and can be accessed through His help alone. Though Allah is *Al Zahir* (The Evident), He is also *Al Batin* (The Hidden), as well as *Al Fattah* (The Opener).

The Sufis trace the origin of *tasawwuf* to the sayings and practice of the Prophet. Even before receiving the revelation, the Prophet used to spend days and nights in solitary meditation in the cave of Hira near Makkah. It was on one such occasion that he saw an apparition in the form of an angel who asked him to recite a verse. The Prophet said he could not read, that he was illiterate (*ummi*) but after the insistence of the angel he recited after him a sentence, which was the first revelation of the Qur'an (96: 1-5)⁴. It is for this reason that the Sufis attach such great importance to meditation and *dhikr*⁵. *Dhikr* and meditation were the forms of the Prophet's prayers before his prophethood.

³ For the names of God in Islam, see *The Most Beautiful Names of Allah* by Samira Fayyad Khawaldeh, Goodword Books, New Delhi, 2001.

⁴ For the life of the Prophet Muhammad, see *The Life and Teaching of the Prophet Muhammad* by the author, Goodword Books, New Delhi, 2004.

⁵ *Dhikr* - means literally "remembrance, recollection" and in the Islamic context denotes the act of repeating God's names.

The Sufis emphasize also the Prophet's self-imposed poverty, contempt of wealth and luxurious living, as well as his fasts, night vigils and additional prayers. The Companions of the Prophet faithfully followed his footsteps and lived simple lives. The Pious Caliphs refused to indulge themselves even in ordinary comforts, in spite of having the wealth of the whole Islamic world at their disposal. They considered the love of wealth as one of the greatest obstacles in the path of their devotion to God.

Like the other branches of Islamic learning, Sufism too believes that the true knowledge is the knowledge of God and it is passed down from a master to a disciple. The master's oral instructions give life to the articles of faith. Thus the master's fundamental concern is to shape the character of the disciple and help him in attaining his goal, which is to come near to God and become one with Him. This concept of *pir-o-murid*⁶ relationship emphasizes the personal dimension of the relationship between the Divine and the human.

The Sufi Concept of Meditation (Dhikr and Muraqaba)

Sufism, the form which mysticism has taken in Islam, is not so much a set of doctrines as a mode of thinking and feeling within a specific religious domain. In a way, it represents a reaction against the intellectualism and literalism of the scholars as well as the worldly attitude of the rulers.

Mysticism has been traced to the Prophet and the times of the Pious Caliphs, but it gathered strength during the Umayyad rule (660-750) and grew further over the centuries. Islam prohibited its adherents from practicing the mortifying austerity and asceticism of Christian monks or,

⁶ For an exposition on the Sufi master-disciple relationship, see *Pir-Murid relationship: A Study of the Nizamuddin Dargah* by Desiderio Pinto, Manohar, New Delhi, 1995.

for that matter, the Hindu yogis. But in spite of the religious injunctions, asceticism kept on gaining ground within the Islamic community, with a large number of pious worshippers seeking to secure salvation through devotional practices (often frowned upon by the orthodoxy), meditation and withdrawing from society. The worldliness and absolutism of the Umayyad caliphs and their regime were yet another factor encouraging pious men to sever their connections with the obviously corrupting world. Turning away from it, they found strength in contemplating the mysteries of God, the soul and Creation.

The early ascetics and their spiritual descendents, the Sufis, usually wore, as already mentioned, the undyed coarse woollen mantles similar to those worn by the Christian ascetics. That is why the term Sufi is usually considered to come from the Arabic word *suf*, or wool. Gradually 'Sufi' came to designate a very varied group of individuals who differentiated themselves from others by emphasizing certain specific teachings and practices mentioned in the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet of Islam.

Though originally Sufism was just a pious mystical trend within Islam with certain individuals being more known than others, there was no attempt to give it any organizational form. But the twelfth century saw the crystallization of a number of orders. Now certain chains of lineages through which different Sufis traced their allegiance were put in place connecting them with a spiritual hierarchy going back to the Prophet, mostly through 'Ali and sometimes through Abu Bakr, giving them legitimacy and enhancing their popular appeal through a firm connection with a charismatic and historical predecessor.⁷

⁷ For early Sufism and the development of Sufi orders see for example, *A History of Sufism in India*, Vol. I, S.A.A. Rizvi, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1978.

Without going into the details of the early and subsequent development of the Sufi orders⁸ (sing. *silsila* pl. *salasil* meaning “chain, lineage”; or *tariqa* pl. *taruq* meaning “the way”) it can be safely assumed that the different Sufi orders were and still are founded on a unique system based on the relationship between the master and a disciple, in Arabic, respectively *murshid* (guide, mentor) and *murid* (aspirant). To follow the Sufi path (*tariqa*) it has always been necessary to accept the authority and guidance of those who have already passed through its various stages (sing. *maqam*, pl. *maqamat*).

The Sufi masters believe that every man has an inherent ability to achieve a release from the self and obtain a union with God. However, this ability being merely latent, the aspirant cannot attain it by himself, without the guidance of a mentor. It is only a mentor who can lead him to the ways of proper meditation so that, finally, he may acquire an insight into spiritual truth. According to Sufism, *ma'arifah*, which means gnosis, cannot be reached through intellectual exercise but solely through ecstatic states. A celebrated theologian and theorist of mysticism, Abu Hamid Muhammad al Ghazzali (d. 1111), who is famous within the mainstream of Islam as an authority on *fiqh* (jurisprudence) as well as for his perfectly argued and clearly articulated attacks on the philosophers, writes of his own realization of Truth: “I knew that the complete mystic ‘way’ includes both intellectual belief and practical activity; the latter consists in getting rid of the obstacles in the self and in stripping off its base characteristics and vicious morals, so that the heart may attain to freedom from what is not God and to constant recollection of Him... It became clear to me, however, that what is most distinctive of mysticism is something which cannot be apprehended by study, but only by

⁸ See for example, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* by J.S.Trimmingham, Oxford, 1971, or particular entries in the *Encyclopedia of Islam*, Brill, Leiden, 1961 and after.

immediate experience (*dhawq* - literally 'tasting'), by ecstasy and by a moral change."⁹

The Sufi who sets out to seek God calls himself a traveller (*salik*). He advances by slow stages (*maqamat*) along a path (*tariqa*) towards union with Reality (*Fana' fil Haqq*). This path, according to al-Sarraj (d.988), author of *Kitab al-Luma' fi'l Tasawwuf*¹⁰, the oldest comprehensive treatise on Sufi teaching, consists of the following seven "stages":

1. Repentance (*tawbah*)
2. Fear of the Lord (*wara'*)
3. Renunciation (*zuhd*)
4. Poverty (*faqr*)
5. Patience or endurance (*sabr*)
6. Trust in God (*tawakkul*)
7. Satisfaction/contentment (*rida*)¹¹

The book of Sirraj in which the stages were thus enumerated, was written in Iran in the tenth century, much before Al-Ghazali, during the period when Sufism was first being consolidated as a coherent body of spiritual teachings and thus gives a comprehensive picture of how the mystical path was in harmony with all aspects of Islamic religious law and doctrine. At

⁹ *The Faith and Practice of Al-Ghazali* tr. W.M. Watt, Oneworld Publications, Oxford, 1953, 1994, pp 56-57; the above book consists of a translation of *Deliverance from Error (Al-Munqidh min ad-Dalal)*, which is largely autobiographical, and *The Beginning of Guidance (Bidayat al-Hidayah)* from *The Revival of the Religious Sciences (Ihya' Ulum ad-Din)*. For a translation of the complete *Ihya' Ulum ad-Din*, see also *Imam Ghazali's Ihya Ulum-id-Din*, tr. Maulana Fazul-ul-Karim, Sind Sagar Academy, Lahore, 1971.

¹⁰ Abu Nasr 'Abdallah bin 'Ali al-Sarraj al-Tusi *The Kitab al-Luma' fi 'l-Tasawwuf* ed. R.A. Nicholson, London, 1914 and 1963. The title can be translated as *The Book of Flashes*. This book has also been translated into Urdu by Sayyid Asrar Bukhari *Kitab al-Luma'*, Lahore: Islamic Book Foundation, 1984.

¹¹ For a description of the 'stages', with references to al-Sirraj and Sufi writers later than al-Sirraj, see for example: *The Persian Sufis* by C.Rice, Ltd., London, 1964; S.H.Nasr, *Sufi Essays*, London 1972; and others.

the same time the author insists upon a multi-level interpretation of the sacred text (Qur'an), which corresponds to the different levels of the listeners' capacity to understand.

This notion of degrees of knowledge and nearness to God is one of the fundamental characteristics of the mystical teachings of Sufism in general till today.

Though in theory the path is open to all, virtually nobody can travel along the path without a guiding mentor, or the higher levels of knowledge, understanding and proximity to God would elude him forever. So the stages are an inherent part of the path and define the ascetic and ethical discipline of the Sufi. By strictly adhering to the above seven stages, the *salik* is blessed with ten states (sing. *hal*, pl. *ahwal*): meditation (*muraqaba*), nearness (*qurb*), love (*mahabbah*), fear (*khawf*), hope (*rija*), longing (*shauq*), intimacy (*uns*), tranquillity (*itminan*), contemplation (*mushahada*), and certainty (*yaqin*)¹²; all with God as the referent (object). While the stages themselves can be arrived at and achieved through one's own effort, under the guidance of a mentor, the 'states' are spiritual feelings and dispositions over which a man has no control and are a gift from God to be freely given or withheld. Also, as 'states' are divine gifts, they can take many forms and colours and are often beyond description.

A Sufi's "path" is not traversed until the aspirant has passed all the "stages", achieving perfection in the preceding one before advancing to the next, and also having experienced whatever "states" it pleases God to bestow upon him. Only then is he permanently raised to the higher planes of consciousness, which Sufis call "gnosis" (*ma'arifah*) and true reality (*haqiqat*),

¹² As given by al-Sirraj in his manual mentioned above.

where the “seeker” (*talib*) becomes the “knower” or “gnostic” (*arif*), and realizes the knowledge of Reality.

The first place in the list of “stages” is occupied by repentance (*tawbah*). Repentance is described as the awakening of the soul from the slumber of heedlessness, so that one feels contrition for past disobedience. To be truly penitent, one must abandon sin and firmly resolve never to return to it in the future. Turning one’s back on the vanities of the world, one must set out to seek out a teacher, *pir-o-murshid*, to guide him on the way to perfection.

The second stage which the aspirant must attain and which is, as it were, necessitated by the first, is called *wara’*, which can be translated as “the fear of the Lord”, for God detests whatever hinders the heart from giving attention to Him. Hakim Sana’i of Ghazna (d. 1131), author of *Hadiqat al-Haqiqah* (“Garden of Reality”) writes:

“If a thing hold you back on the Way, what matter if it be faith or infidelity?

If it keeps you far from the Friend¹³, what matter if the image be foul or fair?”¹⁴

“The fear of the Lord” leads to the third stage, *zuhd* or “detachment”. *Zahid* is one who has renounced the world in order to give himself to God.

Logically, the next stage of “poverty”, or *faqr* follows. Voluntary poverty is the Sufi’s pride as it was the pride of the Prophet (*Faqr fakhri* - “Poverty is my pride” states a *hadith*). Strictly speaking, the Sufi chooses neither poverty nor wealth: his only preference is for what God sends or bestows.

¹³ Al Wali (“Friend, Protector”) is one of the names of Allah. Also, the Sufis call themselves and are called “Friends of God” (pl. *auliya*, sing. *wali*).

¹⁴ Quoted after C. Rice, *The Persian Sufis*, London, 1964, p. 41.

“Patience”, what the following stage consists of, is a virtue without which the depths of poverty could not be borne. Thus it is said to be the better part of faith, if not the whole of it.

“Trust or self-surrender” is the attitude of one who entrusts himself completely to God. It springs from the very fundamental Islamic position and forms a part of its creed (*aqida*). Its roots are in *tauhid*, or belief in the One God. Al Ghazali says: “*Tawakkul* or God reliance, is a stage of religion and a state of progress of the believers. Rather it is the highest state of those who are near God... The meaning of God reliance is the intermingling of three elements — intellect, *shariat* and *tauhid* — in a proportionate manner.”¹⁵

The last stage or *rida* denotes a condition in which the spiritual traveller is always pleased with whatever providence sends his way. Junayd (d. 910) says: “He is the greatest amongst men who has subordinated his will to that of the Lord and is content with His dealings.”¹⁶

To emphasize that the aim and end of Sufism and its Way is to reach God, the Truth (*Al Haqq*) and not merely the act of passing through so many stages and experiencing so many states, let us recall this anecdote about Junayd found in the *Tadhkirat ul-Auliya* of Farid ud din Attar (d. 1229).

“For forty successive years, Junayd kept awake for whole nights in his devotional practices. Thereupon the pride was born in him that he had reached the spiritual pinnacle. The Divine Voice reprimanded Junayd and said, ‘The time has arrived when you should be declared a heretic.’ He

¹⁵ for quotation, see p. 235 of Book IV, Imam *Ghazali's Ihya ulum-id-din*, tr. Maulana Fazul ul Karim, Lahore, 1971. This volume deals with all the stages of mystical progress.

¹⁶ *Tadhkirat ul-Auliya* of Fariduddin Attar, tr. Bankey Bihari, Lahore, 1961, p. 110.

cried, 'Lord! What is my fault?' The reply came, 'Could there be a greater sin than that 'you' in you still survives (i.e. your ego is not yet dead)?' He sighed and bowed his head in submission saying, 'He who attaineth not to the union of the Lord, all his virtues are sins.'¹⁷

It might be said that spiritual practice is the core of Sufism and Sufi writers have certainly elaborated upon its theories and metaphysical points of view, but it is in meditation, prayer, fasting, and day-to-day practices that we find the life of the mystical path. A great many Sufi writings in fact treat these kinds of practices in great details. This is particularly true of the meditative practices associated with the "recollection" (*dhikr*) of the names of God. *Dhikr Allah*, or remembrance of God, refers to invocation of the Divine Name. The Qur'an often speaks of *dhikr* as an act of worship: "Remember Me, I will remember you" (2: 152). "Invoke the name of your Lord and devote yourself to Him with utter devotion" (73:8) and "Your foremost duty is to remember God." (29:45)

Dhikr is regarded as the most important element of Sufi meditation. For the Sufis, *dhikr* is a method of spiritual concentration consisting of an invocation of the Divine Name or repetition of a sacred formula under the direction of a spiritual master belonging to a legitimate mystical order with an authentic chain of transmission (*silsila*). The spiritual master, or shaykh, gives the practitioner the necessary permission to perform *dhikr*.

The performance of *dhikr* is essentially a spiritual exercise through which Sufis are able to experience God's presence in every fibre of their very being. It is through *dhikr* that they achieve *fana* ' or "annihilation" and subside in God for ever (*baqa* '). Junayd says: "Whosoever repeats the Name of the Lord merges into the Name and the Name merges into the Lord."¹⁸ Another

¹⁷ See p.. 102 of the above.

¹⁸ See p.. 109 of the above.

Sufi says: “The first stage of *dhikr* is to forget self, and the last stage is the effacement of the worshipper in the act of worship, and total absorption in the object of worship.”¹⁹

Dhikr is performed both communally and in seclusion. The former enables senior Sufi disciples to supervise the progress of their juniors. The *dhikr-i-khafi*, recollection performed either mentally or in a very low voice, was recommended by the Naqshbandis.²⁰ The Chishtiya²¹ and Qadriya²² generally performed *dhikr-i-jali*, which was recited aloud. Both forms of *dhikr* required control of breath, of inhalation and exhalation. The formulas of *dhikr* itself differed from one order to another, but generally involved the recitation of various syllables of the *kalima* (Muslim profession of faith) or one or the other of the many names of God, for example: “Glory be to God” (*Subhan Allah*) or “There is no god but God” (*La ilaha illa Allah*), with an intense concentration of every mental and physical faculty upon the single word or phrase. The chanting might be audible or silent - just repeated in the mind without uttering the words themselves - and the Sufis always attached great value to this repetition, or litany, for it enabled them to enjoy an uninterrupted communion with God.

Sahl ibn Abdullah al Tustari (d.896)²³, a noted Sufi of an early period, asked one of his disciples to keep on saying “Allah! Allah!” throughout the

¹⁹ See: *The Mystics of Islam*, R.A. Nicholson, London, 1963, p.48.

²⁰ *Naqshbandi silsila* - a Sufi order of Central Asian origins, established by Khwaja Ya'qub Yusufal Hamadani (d. 1140), which flourished in India and produced such figures as Baqi Billa (d. 1565), who brought it to Hindustan; Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi (d. 1624); and Shaikh' Abd al Haqq Dihlavi (d. 1642).

²¹ *Chishti silsila* - one of the most popular and influential mystical orders of India, introduced by Khwaja Mu'in al Din Chishti (d. 1236). Nizam ud din Auliya belonged to this order.

²² *Qadri silsila* - order named after ' Abd al Qadir al Jilani (d. 1166), with centres all over the Islamic world.

²³ See: *The Kashful Mahjub of Al-Hujwiri*, ed. R.A. Nicholson, London, 1967, pp.139-140 and especially, pp.195-210; and *Tadhkirat ul-Auliya* by Fariduddin 'Attar, tr. Bankey Behari, Lahore, 1961, pp. 83-84.

day, without any intermission. When the disciple acquired the habit of doing so, Sahl instructed him to repeat the same words during the night, until they came forth from his lips even while he was asleep. Finally the disciple's whole being was absorbed by the thought of Allah.

Dhikr popularized the use of *tasbih* (prayer beads), consisting of 99 or 100 beads to facilitate the recitation. Some orders used rosaries of 301 or 1000 beads. The rosary acquired symbolic importance through its use in ceremonies of initiation and other rituals of the orders. It was also a symbol of authority. The rosary of the founder of the branch of the particular order was inherited by his successors, being especially revered, since it was impregnated with the *barakah* (blessings) of a lifetime's recital of divine names.

Dhikr has a variety of forms, which have been elaborated upon in the Sufi writings: *dhikr-i-jali*, *dhikr-i-khafi*, *habs-i-dam*, *pas-i-anfas*, *naf-i-asbat*. Breathing exercises, controlling respiration, and adopting specific sitting postures go with *dhikr*.

Dhikr-i-jali consists of sitting in the usual prayer posture and loudly reciting the word *Allah*, drawing it first from one's left side, and then from one's throat. Repetition of the word *Allah* may grow more and more intense, and louder with each successive breath, repeating being done first from one's right knee and then from the left knee.

Some Sufis fold their legs under them and begin repeating *Allah* (first from their right and then from their left knees). The process goes on and on in this manner. Thus the *salik* may, seated in the same position, exclaim the word *Allah* first from the left knee, then from the right, then from the left side, and then, finally, in front, still louder.

Some Sufis may be observed sitting with their eyes closed in prayer facing the Kabah, uttering *la*, drawing the sound as if from the navel up to the left shoulder; then uttering *ilaha* (the sound rising from the brain). Finally *Allah* is repeated from the left side with lots of energy and stress. These exercises are called *dharb* (strikes). *Dharb* is performed from all sides: front, navel, brain, etc.

Dhikr-i-khafi is a practice of remembering God silently. The following phrases, *Allah-u-Samiun* (God is All-Hearing), *Allah-u-Alimun* (God is All-Knowing) and *Allah-u-Basirun* (God is All-Seeing), are successively recited with the eyes shut and lips closed. Recitation continues with what is described as the tongue of the heart. Each exhalation of breath begins with *la ilaha*, and each inhalation with *illa Allah*. The whole process or technique is set forth in numerous manuals, but it is frequently difficult to understand without the commentary of an experienced shaykh.

Habs-i-dam is a term standing for “restraining breathing”. Holding his breath, the Sufi traveller conceives of his heart (*qalb*) as continuously repeating *la ilaha illAllah* (‘There is no god but God’). With the passage of time, the practice intensifies to the extent that one can repeat the creed several hundred times within the span of one breath.

Pas-i-anfas is a practice during which the Sufi concentrates his inward eye on his heart, which he imagines to be engraved with the word *Allah*. Furthermore, he imagines that every inhaling of his is producing the sound *Allah* and exhaling, *Hu*, making up the phrase: *Allah Hu* (There is God).

In exercises known as *mahmuda* and *nasira*, one concentrates while meditating on a part of the body. *Mahmuda* implies concentrating on the tip of the nose, while in *nasira* one’s concentration is directed towards the middle of the forehead.

Naf-i-asbat or “negation and affirmation” is yet another method of practicing *dhikr*. The worshipper sits in the posture of prayer facing Makkah. He imagines that he is bringing up *la ilaha* from his navel, and then he expels his breath by a jerk in the direction of his right shoulder. He then utters *illa Allah*, jerking his head towards his heart, as if imprinting these words upon it.

Dhikr was followed by meditation to allow the individual thoughts of the Sufis to emerge and envelop their mind. Generally, a dervish meditated on some particular verse of the Qur’an and at the same time the image of the *pir* was recalled to mind.

Muraqaba, the Arabic term used for meditation, literally means “vigilance” or “awareness”, which is further defined as an aspect of contemplation (*tafakkur*), waiting upon a spiritual presence, a permanent state of attentiveness. The Prophet said: “My eye sleeps, but my heart is awake.” According to another *hadith*, he said: “Worship God as though you see Him, for even if you do not see Him, He sees you.” Anyone who feels sure that God is always watching over him will devote himself to contemplating God and no evil thoughts will find their way to his heart.

This is how the practices accompanying *muraqaba* (deep contemplation) are carried out as expounded in the chapter on *Dhikr, Muraqaba, Tauhid, Daur* and *Halat* (“Remembrance, Meditation, Oneness of God, Whirling and Ecstasy”) of ‘*Awariful Ma’arif*’²⁴ by Shihabuddin Suhrawardi (d. 1234):

“The exercises of *muraqaba* (fearful contemplation) and of *tauhid* (the unity of God) are as follows:

²⁴ See chapter: *The Dance of the Sarna*, pp.297-298, in *The ‘Awariful Ma’arif* of Shihabuddin Suhrawardi in tr. of H.W. Clarke, Delhi, 1984.

(a) On their heels, elbows touching, the dervishes sit in a circle; and simultaneously make slight movements of the head and of the body.

(b) Or they balance themselves slowly right to left, left to right; and incline the body forwards and rearwards.

(c) Or, seated, they begin these motions in measured cadence with a staid countenance, eyes closed, or fixed upon the ground; and continue them on foot.”

After that follows the *daur* (rotating dance) accompanied by cries of *Ya Allah! Ya Hu*. The *halat* (ecstasy) is achieved by the combination of *dhikr*, *muraqaba*, *daur* and putting red hot irons (called *gul* - the red rose - by the participating dervishes) in their mouths, which, however, show no wounds the next day.

Al Hujwari (d. 1077), author of another Sufi manual *Kashf al Mahjub* (“The Revelation of the Mystery”), writing much before Suhrawardi, says: “When self-will vanishes in this world, contemplation is attained, and when contemplation is firmly established, there is no difference between this world and the next.”

In some orders such as the Naqshbandi, *muraqaba* or meditation begins with the repetition of *Allah-u-Hadiri* (God is present before me), *Allah-u-Naziri* (God sees me), *Allah-u-Mai* (God is with me). God’s name may be recited aloud or silently, mentally, as one pleases. Then the worshipper meditates upon some verses of the Qur’an. The following verses are most often meditated upon:

“He is First. He is Last. He is Manifest, Hidden, and The One Who Knows All Things.” (57:3)

“He is with you wherever you may be.” (57:4)

“We are closer to man than his jugular vein.” (50: 15)

“In whichever direction you turn, there is the face of God.” (2:109)

“God encompasses all things.” (4:125)

“All that is on earth shall pass away, but the face of the Lord shall abide, suffused with brilliance, majesty and glory.” (55:26-27)

Thus meditation means forgetting all else besides God and is an intense remembrance of Him. Those who have undergone rigorous training under the guidance of a spiritual mentor may achieve this even when not in their teacher’s presence.

Although these practices set Sufis apart from the body of the community, they nonetheless always remained an integral part of it and played a major role in shaping the popular face of Islam. In general, the Sufis looked upon themselves as Muslims who take most seriously God’s call to perceive His presence both in the world and the self. They tend to put more stress on looking inward than outward, on contemplation over action, spiritual exercise and development of the self over dry legalism, and cultivation of the soul over social, worldly interaction with people. Sufism considered itself, and does so today too, a science of how to attain a direct knowledge of God and a personal experience of the Divine.

The aim of meditation in Sufism is to activate spirituality. As the Sufis believe that the heart is the centre of spirituality, it is the heart then that needs to be activated by turning to the practice of meditation. Once the heart is activated, a Sufi can reach his goal.

As already mentioned above, *dhikr* may take a very vivacious and

animated mode leading to foot play (*daur, raqs*) and dancing, accompanied by chanting, which might change to almost singing. The Sufi literature often talks of yet another specifically Sufi practice facilitating direct approach to God by activating the heart. It is called *sama'* or "listening to music". *Sama'* is considered to be a very effective and powerful technique of achieving the longed for nearness and knowledge of God. Etymologically it is derived from an Arabic verb *sama'*, which means a "hearing" or an "audition". The word itself does not occur in the Qur'an in this meaning, but in classical Arabic it meant "a singing or musical performance".

Certain theologians hold that listening to music is permissible as long as its aim is not merely to amuse oneself, and on the condition that it does not induce sinful thoughts. The lawfulness of music, and connected with it singing and dancing have been a subject of long controversy within Islam. Importance was attached to this question when *sama'* was adopted as a spiritual exercise and "as a means of revelation attained through ecstasy" by the Sufi circles in the late second or early third century Hijra (9th or 10th AD). Thus it was in Sufism that *sama'* acquired its technical meaning of listening to music, singing, chanting and rhythmical recitation meant to produce the religious emotions and ecstasy (*wajd*) of knowing God most directly.

All the manuals of Sufism, starting with the earliest ones, usually have a chapter on *sama'* or "audition". As it was a controversial subject, usually they try to justify its use and explain its role in reaching God. Abu Bakr al-Kalabadhi (d. 988) writes in *Kitab al-Ta'aru fil madhhab ahl al-tasawwuf*:

"Audition is a resting after the fatigue of the (spiritual) moment, and a recreation for those who experience (spiritual) states, as well as a means of awakening the consciences of those who busy themselves with other things...

I heard Abu Qasim al Baghdadi say: 'Audition is of two kinds. One class of man listens to discourse, and derives therefrom an admonition: such a man listens discriminately and with his heart (as the seat of the intellect) present. The other class listens to music (melody), which is the food of the spirit: and when the spirit obtains its food, it attains its proper station, and turns aside from the government of the body; and then there appears in the listener a commotion and a movement.' Al-Junayd said: 'The mercy (of God) descends upon the poor man on three occasions: when he is eating, for he only eats when he is in need to do so; when he speaks, for he only speaks when he is compelled; and during audition, for he only listens in a state of ecstasy.'²⁵

Like all the other Sufi practices *sama'* too is performed under the leadership of the shaykh or the teacher, who initiates and ends it with the recitation of *Fatiha* or the opening chapter of the Qur'an and controls its every stage as well as its duration. Often it is performed on a Thursday evening and today's *qawwali* recitals at the shrines of the saints are a continuation of the same traditional practice. It must be remembered that all Persian and Urdu poetry, including the mystical, is intended to be chanted, either to a regular tune or in free musical improvisation. The best performers (of the contemporary: the late Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, Abida Parveen) combine a formal chant with occasional outbursts of improvisation, stirring themselves and their listeners to an ecstatic state. In Iran the *Masnawi* of Maulana Rumi is often used on such occasions and on the Indian subcontinent, the poetry of Amir Khusraw, Bhule Shah (who wrote in Punjabi), Shah Latif (writing in Sindi) as well as others.

²⁵ Tr. by A.J.Arberry as *The Doctrine of The Sufis*, Delhi, 1994 reprint of 1935 edition; quotations are from Chapter LXXV of *Audition*, pp. 163-165.

Conclusion

Sufism conceives of itself as a mystical quest for the Truth and all its practices serve this end. The journey along the Path to the One is an arduous one and requires many resources. Meditation in the form of *dhikr*, or remembering God, and *muraqaba*, or contemplation of the mystery of Being and Creation, are but devices to help along the Way. But, ultimately, it is Allah who in an act of grace unveils Himself to the traveller and no spiritual exercise can even attempt to equal His compassion. A saint dreamt he saw Al-Junayd after his death and asked him how God dealt with him. He said: “He forgave me out of His mercy and not due to my spiritual practices. except for the *two-rakat namaz* that i offered at midnight to My Lord, none served any good purpose for me here”.²⁶

²⁶ P. 114 of “Tadhkirat ul-Auliya” quoted above.

Tasawwuf Today

Sufism (*tasawwuf*) ought to be just as important today as it has ever been throughout its long history. Being a way of purifying the soul – a necessity for each new generation – its role should never diminish with changing times and circumstances. Yet, paradoxically, although it still has millions of adherents, as a form of religion, it is definitely in a state of decline.

This is because the traditional form of *tasawwuf*, which has been shaped by many historical accretions, has no great appeal for the modern educated mind. For instance, *tasawwuf*, as we now know it, is embroidered by tales of miracles and mysticism, and to find support for its ideology, it relies upon doubtful analogies. But the scientific mind is skeptical of analogies and is impatient with mysticism.

There is also the question of Sufism being heart-based, the heart in ancient times being regarded as the seat of thought and emotion. But now modern science has shown the heart to be nothing but an organ which controls the circulation of the blood and it has been conceded that it is the mind which is the centre of both thought and emotion. This being so, *tasawwuf* should now be developed as a mind-based philosophy. It will thus have a much stronger attraction for educated minds.

The need of the hour, therefore, is to modernize Sufism, couching it in the contemporary idiom, and explaining its ideology in a way that should address the present-day individual, whose major concern is as much with intellectual development as it is with purification of the soul. That is why

tasawwuf should necessarily be linked with real events and its objectives expressed in a scientific manner. Its attraction will thus reach far beyond the poor, the distressed, the under-educated and the downtrodden who at present make up the bulk of its following. Even in a modern country like Egypt, the adherents of Sufism largely fall into the category of the underprivileged.

One constituent of present-day Sufism which may appeal to the modern mind is the practice of meditation. But it should be borne in mind that meditation, which began to be favoured by the Sufis under the influence of local yogic practices, should be discounted, for the simple reason that it fails to awaken the human mind. In any case, meditation is practiced more to relieve stress and promote relaxation than to attain great spiritual heights. Likewise, the practice of inducing a state of ecstasy by means of special exercises is not a part of authentic Sufism, because it has nothing to do with that spiritual development which is the actual aim of Sufism.

Formerly, people used to go to Sufis in order to learn the spiritual aspects of their religion and to be trained in spirituality. But now the situation has changed. One reason for this is that at present there are very few genuine Sufis in the Khanqahs. This has led to *tasawwuf* existing today in a degenerated form. For example, nowadays people do visit *dargahs*, supposedly to satisfy their spiritual feelings. But, in actuality, all that they accomplish is to meet Sufi *pirs* in order to ask for their blessings and then go and prostrate themselves at Sufi graves. All this represents Sufism in a diluted if not distorted form. In ancient times a Sufi was revered on account of his great spiritual achievements. But, now Gaddis (seats) have been formed in the name of past Sufis and anyone who acquires such a seat, mostly as a matter of heredity, is acknowledged as a Sufi. These Sufis who have acquired gaddis in this way carry out no new research and produce no new books, for no

rethinking or soul-searching is allowed. How then can *Tasawwuf* develop and face other disciplines of the modern age? Whereas in ancient times *tasawwuf* was a living discipline, now it is largely ritual-based and as such has become stagnant. This, more than anything else, has led to the erosion of true *tasawwuf*.

However, we do find some reform and development in certain Sufi organizations which, to a great extent, eliminate miracles and ecstasy as parts of Sufism and which look with disfavour upon “shrine worship.” Fazlur Rahman in his well known book, *Islam*, has called this orientation towards reform “neo-Sufism’. Reform in Sufism has actually been long overdue, for it had adopted so many indigenous rituals and practices that it had lost its original character altogether. For example, in the Indian context, it had adopted various yogic practices, including the inducement of ecstasy through loud music and song. All this went against the spirit of Islam. This ecstasy element has taken another form in Turkey where its practitioners are called “whirling dervishes”. They go on dancing in circular movements until they enter a trance-like state. According to Islam we have come into this world for the purpose of God-realization, not for self-realization. Since the basis of Aryan religions was self-realization, what they held for man was a part (*ansh*) of God. This concept crept into Sufi thought. The Sufis started different kinds of yoga practices in the form of exercises which were believed to aid self-realization. This, according to them, amounted to God realization.

In this way a number of Sufi orders had diverged a long way from the path of the Shariah. Ultimately, there arose a strong movement in different parts of the world to bring Sufism closer to the Shariah, the Naqshbandiyas being foremost among its promoters.

These new orders were also more organized than their predecessors. One reason for the revival of these Sufi orders in the twentieth century was

colonialism, under which the Muslims suffered from an identity crisis. For the majority of Muslims, interaction with the West during the colonial period was too great a culture shock to bear. Political power, their greatest support, had gone. Now they needed something to pin their hopes on. In this state of helplessness, the Khanqahs, Zawiyas (shrines) came to their rescue. In the hope of finding solace in spirituality, they thronged to these shrines and Sufi pirs. The pirs gave them incantations to recite on a rosary; and this was supposed to solve all of their problems.

Doubtless, not all of these Sufis were genuine, but they gave Muslims some hope of getting out of the morass they were floundering in after losing political power. This trading on false hopes worked and Sufism was again revived in a new garb. Some of the shrines have now amassed so much wealth that they are running their own TV channels, one of these being QTV from Pakistan, where Sufi shrines abound.

People believed that they would bring about a spiritual revolution, but no such thing happened. No such revolution can be brought about by just reviving certain rituals. Spiritual revival can be effected only through a re-awakening of the spirit by means of intellectual development.

One reason for attaching importance to these Sufi orders was that the people associated with them engaged in missionary activities and they also played a role in bringing about puritanical reforms or spiritual revival, albeit more in form than in spirit. Their organizations served as a base for reformers to make efforts to purify religious practices in order to revive the faith. Most revivalists have Sufi affiliations. To cite one example, the great jihad at the beginning of the 19th century in northern Nigeria was led by Usman dan Fodio, who was a Qadri. In many other areas, Sufi orders were associated with reform movements and jihad campaigns against colonialists.

In the 19th and the 20th centuries, a number of Sufi traditions were directly or indirectly involved in shaping Muslim responses to the west. Thus they provided the organizational framework and the intellectual inspiration for Muslim responses to modern challenges to Islam. In most cases they provided support to the movements of resistance to foreign rule, especially in the 19th century. Many major wars against expanding European powers were fought by Muslim organizations that had Sufi origins.

Sufi orders were also important in shaping the responses to the challenge to Islam in the modern age. In the 19th century, their participation was limited to providing organizational bases for opposition to European expansion and at times fighting in the battlefield. But, by the 20th century, these Sufi orders began responding to various needs of the community. In some countries they even went to the extent of providing an organizational basis for political parties. In Sudan, for example, the Khatmiya provided the foundation for the National Unionist party. In Senegal, the Murdiya provided an organization for the development of cash crops and played an important role in modernizing the agricultural sector of the Senegalese economy. Recently, in the war in Afghanistan after the Soviet occupation in 1979, the Qadriyas and Naqshbandiyas played a great part in organizing mujahiddin groups. Thus in many countries the organizational traditions of the Sufi orders provided important bases for responding to specific challenges.

Another major Islamic activist movement, the Muslim Brotherhood in Sudan, had many prominent leaders and were associated with Tariqas (Sufi orders) in Sudan. Hasan Turabi, the well-known leader, was one of them. Turabi emphasized the role of *Ijtihad*, which meant making an effort to apply Islamic teachings to changing situations in order to update Islam.

Turabi's revolution was in fact a reaffirmation of the ancient Sufi ethic, with its emphasis on the spirit rather than the letter of Islam. The Sufi organizational traditions provided direct means for meeting challenges in modern situations.

The Sufi orders, having withstood many reformist attempts to abolish them, (notably Ataturk's initiatives in the 1920s and 1930s in the new republic of Turkey) continue to have special strengths. With their emphasis on individual devotion and small-group experience, they project the Muslim identity in a way that promotes peaceful co-existence with religious pluralism and even modern secularism. They have, moreover, become important vehicles for Islamic expansion in modern western societies, where the open inclusiveness and the aesthetic dimensions of the great Sufi philosophies have considerable appeal.

Glossary

Abdal: Literally, ‘the substitutes’. According to Sufi belief there exists a set of seventy saints. These are called *abdal* because when one dies, another carries on his function. A certain number of them are the *siddiqun* or The Truthful Ones. One Truthful or *Siddiq* is the *qutb* (axis or pole), the center of the human activity on earth.

Al Hikma al Aliya: Divine Wisdom

Alim: Sing. *alim*, pl. *ulama*, from *ilm* – knowledge; a learned man, a religious scholar.

Ahwal: pl. of **hal**, spiritual state of the soul

Arif: Literal meaning: ‘the knower’, ‘the knowing one’, ‘gnostic’. In the context of Sufism it implies a person possessed of a direct knowledge of God; a mystic who knows God through personal spiritual experience and vision; one who has attained gnosis or ‘*ma‘arifah*’ and thus, reached the highest stage in the spiritual path.

Ashab-i Suffa: ‘The People of the Bench’, also called ‘The People of the Porch.’ When the Prophet of Islam migrated to Madinah, a number of his followers did not engage themselves in activities that would earn them their livelihood but spent their time in worship and memorizing the Qur’an and the *hadith*. The Prophet and his companions looked after their needs. They stayed in the porch of the Prophet’s mosque, hence their name.

Barakah: The actual meaning of the word is ‘to settle’, ‘to flourish’, and ‘to grow’. In Sufism it means ‘blessings’ and ‘grace’ – in the sense of a blessing or a spiritual influence sent down by God and inherent in certain persons or certain objects. Also, certain actions may bring blessings, while certain other actions may dispel it.

Baqa: Literally, ‘remaining’, ‘subsisting’. It is the final stage of a mystic who has been annihilated (*fana*) in God and lives in Him and through Him.

Bast: An expansion of the soul experienced in joy. The word is derived from the divine name *al-Basit*, The Expander, or He Who Gives Joy. In Sufism *bast* is a term for an expanding state of the soul when the heart experiences a state of well-being.

Chilla: Literally: ‘40 days’, or a period of 40 days spent in continuous fasting and spiritual exercises.

Dairah: Literally: ‘a circle’; a small mystic center of like-minded persons.

Darwish: A mendicant; the term is used in the sense of a member of a religious fraternity. The Arabic word is *faqir*.

Dhikr: Remembrance of God, an invocation of God’s name. According to a *hadith*, “For everything there is a polish that takes away rust, and the polish of the heart is the remembrance of God.” In Sufism, *dhikr* prepares the ground for meditation and is one of the central duties of every mystic. Sufism attaches greatest importance to *dhikr* in the attainment of spiritual realization. The Qur’an has this to say on the subject, “And the remembrance of God is greatest.” There are different types of *dhikr*: *dhikr jali* – loud repetition; *dhikr qalbi* – silent repetition within the heart; *dhikr ‘aini* – state when the *dhikr* permeates man’s whole being.

Fana: Literally, ‘extinction’. In Sufism it means to die to the world and to subsist in God alone. This state of subsisting in God is called *baqa* ‘and is the end of the Sufi journey.

Faqr: Literally, ‘poverty.’ In Sufism, it means emptying the soul of the ego’s false ‘reality’ to make way for the realization of God.

Faqir: Literally, ‘the poor’; a Sufi mendicant, a disciple who embraces the way of poverty as a means of realizing God.

Farz: Sing. *farz*, pl. *faraiz*, meaning ‘that which is obligatory’, ‘a duty’. A term used for those rules and ordinances of religion, which are enjoined by

God. These include: witnessing the truth or pronouncing the *shahada*, prayer, fasting, etc.

Fiqh: Jurisprudence, Islamic Law. The science of *fiqh* deals with the laws regulating the ritual and the religious observances (*ibadat*). There are four Sunni schools of *fiqh*: Hanafi, Maliki, Shafii, Hambali. Of the Shiite schools of *fiqh* the most famous is the Jafari school of jurisprudence founded by Jafar as Sadiq (699-765)

Futuh: Voluntary contributions given to the Sufis.

Hal: Sing. *hal*, pl. *ahwal*. The ecstasy, a rapturous state.

Haqiqqa: Literally, 'the truth', 'the reality'; it is the ultimate truth, which transcends human limitations. The *haqiqqa* is also called 'the kernel' or the quintessence. The Sufis believe that to get at the kernel one has to break the shell, or, one has to break the barriers erected by the form and reach the inner spirit to discover God.

Ihsan: Literally: 'to do well' or 'to do everything as beautifully as possible.' In Sufism it refers to the level at which the devotee is completely absorbed in prayer to God. It is defined by the Sufis as the attainment of that degree of devotion at which one begins to experience the presence of God.

Ilm-i-safina: The knowledge obtained from the books, meaning the revealed books.

Ilm-i-sina: The knowledge of the heart, or the knowledge obtained from the spiritual masters.

Iman: Literally, 'to know', 'to believe', to put one's trust in something or someone.' Usually translated as 'belief'. In Islam, it means putting one's trust in and having complete faith in God, His Prophets, His angels, His books, and the Day of Judgement.

Ishq-e-majazi: Love of a human being, as opposed to *ishq-i-haqiqi* or the true love.

Ishq-i-haqiqi: The true love or the love of God.

Jamaaat Khana: A Sufi hospice, a *khanqah*.

Khalwat: Literally: solitary spiritual retreat.

Khanqah: Persian name for a meeting place of dervishes or the Sufis, a Sufi hospice. The terms *zawiyah* or *ribat* are used as synonyms.

Khirqah: Literally, “a rag”; a patched cloak worn by some Sufi orders. The *khirqah* is a sign of poverty and renunciation of the world. The cloaks were not replaced when torn but repeatedly patched instead until the whole garment was reduced to patches.

Kufr: Literally: “covering”, “hiding”; thence, denial of God and disbelief in face of clear revelation. It is the only sin which God will not forgive as it rejects Him and His Mercy.

Langar: Free food distributed in the Sufi hospices to the devotees.

Ma‘arifah: Literally, ‘knowledge’ or ‘gnosis’. In Sufism it means the mystical knowledge of God. It is the final stage when a Sufi’s heart is filled with the wisdom and the realization of the truth.

Mahabbah: Literally: “love”. It refers to the devotion and love for God filling the soul of the mystic. In Sufism *makhafah* or ‘fear of God’ precedes *mahabbah* or ‘love of God’, which in turn culminates in *ma‘arifah* or ‘the realization of God’.

Majlis: Sing. *majlis*, pl. *majaalis*. An assembly, a meeting; a formal *dhikr* or *sama’* session.

Makhafah: Literally: “fear”. In Sufism it refers to the state of being in fear of God. It also implies purification. According to a saying of the Prophet Solomon, “the beginning of wisdom is the fear of God.”

Malfuzaat: Literally, ‘discourse’, ‘conversations’, meaning the conversations of the Sufi mystics recorded by the disciples and compiled in the form of a book.

Maqaam: Literally, ‘a halting place’, ‘a stage in the journey’, ‘a station’; a *salik* must go through a number of stations to reach his destination.

Masnavi: A long narrative poem, often used by the Sufi poets.

Mendicant: Members of religious orders dependent on alms

Mujaddid: The revivor of Islam; a title bestowed on Ahmad Sirhindi who was hailed as *Mujaddid Alf-i Sani* or the revivor of the second millennium.

Majzub: Literally, ‘attracted’. A term used by the Sufis for a person whom God has chosen for Himself, to manifest His love. A *majzub* is thus able to attain to the highest stages of the Sufi knowledge without any effort or exertion.

Muraqaba: Literally: ‘vigilance’. In Sufism it refers to a permanent state of awareness and to the act of meditation. The Prophet once observed: “My eye sleeps but my heart is awake.” It also implies an introspection of the self, which has to be performed on daily basis.

Murid: A Sufi disciple, one who follows the spiritual path under the guidance of a mentor. *Murid* is akin in meaning to *faqir* and *derwish* as well as *salik*.

Murshid: A spiritual guide, a mentor, a teacher. See also: *pir*, *shaykh*.

Nafil: Sing. *nafil*, pl. *nawafil*. Literally: ‘extra’, ‘supererogatory’. The voluntary prayers, added before and after obligatory prayers. In addition to the five obligatory prayers there are additional prayers, which can be performed separately. For example, *ishraq* prayer performed in the morning after sunrise, and the *tahajjud* prayer performed at night. The Prophet himself used to perform supererogatory prayers.

Nafs: The animal soul, ego, or the baser self, responsible for all the evil. The Sufis believe that this baser self in human beings can be controlled only by spiritual exercises, worship and meditation.

Pas-i-anfas: Controlling the breathing; it was the essence of the Sufi

discipline practiced during meditation. The Sufis believed that when breathing was controlled, thoughts were not diffused, and time was properly utilized.

Pir: A spiritual master, a teacher, a mentor, also called *murshid* (guide), *shaykh* (leader). The term 'pir' is used in India in preference to the Arabic word 'shaykh'.

Ribat: Literally, 'a strong-point', 'a post'; used to describe a Sufi center, a hospice. Synonymous with *zawiyyah* and *khanqah*.

Qabz: Literally, 'a contraction'. In Sufism this term denotes contraction or depression of the soul; the state when the soul experiences its limitations and subsequently, the heart is depressed.

Qurb: Literally, "nearness". It refers to the state of 'the nearness to God'. According to the Qur'an the most exalted of God's servants are those who are "brought near" God. They are called *al-muqarrabun*.

Qutb: Literally, 'an axis', 'a pole'; it is believed that the function of the spiritual center resides in a human being called *qutb* who is the highest of the saints.

Salik: Literally, 'a traveller', 'a wayfarer'; a Sufi disciple who has undertaken the *suluk* or the journey towards God. The *salik*, besides being on a spiritual journey, often undertakes actual travel and wanders from place to place in search of spiritual masters and spiritual knowledge. According to a tradition of the Prophet, "be in the world like a traveler, or like a passerby, and recon yourself as of the dead."

Sama': Literally, 'a hearing', 'an audition'. In Sufism it is a musical assembly regarded as a means of inducing a mystical state of ecstasy. Of all the Sufi orders established in India, it was most widely practiced by the Chishtis. The Sufis in general and the Chishtis in particular were criticized by the *ulama* for this practice but they were not prepared to abandon it.

Shahadah: Literally, 'to observe', 'to witness', 'to testify'. It is the first and the foremost of the five pillars of Islam. It is made up of two parts

– the negation and the affirmation: “There is no god but God, and Muhammad is His messenger.”

Shariah: The revealed law, the canonical law of Islam derived from the Qur’an and the *sunnah*.

Shaykh: A spiritual master, a teacher, a mentor and a mystic guide. The spiritual lineage of the shaykh goes back to the Prophet and the Sufi shaykh is the living example of one who has realized the divine truth.

Shirk: Literally, ‘an association’, ‘a partnership’; In Islam, it is a term denoting the act of associating something with God, who is One. It is thus a grave sin and the only sin for which there is no mercy and no forgiveness (4:116).

Silsila: Literally, ‘the chain’, ‘the lineage’; the chain of transmission where the spiritual message, originating with the Prophet and his companions, is passed on from one master or shaykh to another. All Sufi orders are linked by such chains.

Suf: Literally, ‘wool’. Rough, woolen clothing worn by the early ascetics as a symbol of their renunciation of the world. The term Sufism is derived from it.

Sufism: The mystic trend within Islam; *tasawwuf*.

Suluk: Literally, ‘travel’; thus, traveling towards God. The state of the Sufi’s soul and his activity is seen as ‘journeying’ to God. The other name for a Sufi adept is *salik* or the wayfarer.

Tajalli: Literally: “revealing”. In Sufism it is used as a term describing the emanation of inward light, and the unveiling of Divine secrets. This revealing of God’s grace enlightens the heart of the devotee.

Tajrid: Literally: ‘solitude’; complete severance from all worldly things, which entails giving away everything one possessed. The Sufis held that there are two aspects of seclusion. One was the external separation from the world, and the other was an internal separation in which the heart was purified of any thought other than that of God.

Tariqa: Sing. *tariqa*, pl. *turuq*; literally means ‘the way’ or ‘the path’. In Sufism, it is used in two contexts: it either denotes the spiritual way a Sufi has to travel to achieve the realization of God, or a congregation formed around a Sufi master and subsequently, a Sufi order, which traced its spiritual authority through a chain of transmission or *silsila* back to the Prophet. The first *tariqa* to emerge was the *Qadriyya*.

Tasawwuf: The mystic trend in Islam, Sufism; Sufi is the follower of *tasawwuf*.

Tawakkul: An absolute trust in God. This is what the Qur’an says about *tawakkul*: “God is all-sufficient for the man who puts his trust in Him,” (65:3); and, “In God let all the trusting put their trust.” (14:10)

Tawba: Literally: ‘repentance.’ The first rite to be performed by a Sufi was that of repentance, which was the first step towards a new spiritual life. It redeemed one of the past sinful life. Furthermore, if repentance came from a sincere heart it served as a safeguard against future sins. Thus *tawba* brought about a complete revolution in one’s life. Shaykh Nizamuddin once observed that *tawba* was of two kinds – the present and the future. The first required man to feel ashamed of past sins and to sincerely regret them, and the second required him to be fully determined never to commit those sins again, that is, to refrain from further wrongdoing.

Tawhid: Literally: ‘Oneness of God’, monotheism. In Sufi terminology this is the ultimate realization of the oneness of God.

Tawiz: Literally, ‘to flee for refugee.’ An amulet or charm to ward off different ills, both physical and spiritual, by seeking refuge in God; the amulets are most often the passages of the Qur’an or the *hadith*, which are sealed in a leather case, and are worn around the neck or tied to the arm.

Tazkiya: Literally: “purifying”. In Sufism it means the purification of the soul through sincere devotion to God. Purification of the heart and soul are essential to attain divine approval. The Qur’an has this to say: “He indeed shall be successful who purifies himself.” (87:14).

Wahdat al Shahud: ‘Unity of Witness’, ‘Unity of Consciousness’, ‘Unity of Vision’; the concept developed most fully by Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi in opposition to the concept of *wahdat ul wujud* of Ibn ‘Arabi, which to him smacked of pantheism. By this concept, Ahmad Sirhindi meant that the experience of union or oneness with God is related to vision rather than reality.

Wahdat al Wujud: ‘Unity of Being’, ‘Oneness of Being’, a concept developed by Ibn ‘Arabi and followed by all Sufis of the subcontinent except the Naqshbandi followers of Ahmad Sirhindi.

Wird: Set litanies recited by the pious many times a day consisting of Quranic formulas, and in case of the Sufi *wirds*, the litanies are compiled by the famous Sufi saints.

Wujud Zilli: The shadow existence.

Wujud Asli: The real existence.

Wuquf-i ‘adadi: The state of being vigilant about remembering God, so that one’s attention is not diverted.

Wuquf-i qalbi: Keeping the heart alive and receptive to God’s messages.

Wuquf-i zamani: Taking stock of one’s activities, while showing gratitude to God for the time devoted to virtuous deeds, and repenting of one’s misdeeds.

Zawiya: Literally, “a corner”, thus: a place of religious retreat, or a Sufi meeting place where the Sufis came together for prayer and *dhikr* or invocation of God’s name.

Index

A

- Abbasid caliphs, 122
'Abd al Khaliq Ghujduwani, 149
Abd al Qadir Jilani, 170
Abd al Wahhab, 110, 124
Abd al-Khaliq Ghujdawani, 154
Abd ur Razzaq, 124
Abdul Hakim Sialkoti, 117
Abdul Haq Muhaddis Dihlawi, 124
Abdul Haqq, 125, 126
Abdul Qadir Jilani, 14, 54, 64, 108, 111, 125, 130, 131, 132, 133
Abdul Quddus Gangohi, 102
Abdul Razzaq, 110, 117
Abdul Wahid bin Zayed, 27
Abdur Rahman Jami, 8, 159
Abu al Najib Suhrawardi, 132
Abu Bakr, 14, 22, 152, 192, 199
Abu Bakr al-Kalabadhi, 212
Abu Darda, 19, 23
Abu Hamid Muhammad al Ghazzali, 200
Abu Najib, 133
Abu Najib Suhrawardi, 55, 132, 180
Abu'l Najib Suhrawardi, 14
Abu Qasim al Baghdadi, 213
Abu Shakur, 84
Abul Faraj al-Jawzi, 115
Abul Fazl, 168
Abul Khayr Hammad ibn Muslim al-Dabbas, 113
Abyssinia, 179
Afghan, 179
Afghanistan, 54, 159, 179, 219
Africa, 128
Agra, 166, 168
Ahmad Abdul Haq, 102
Ahmad ibn Hambal, 108
Ahmad Sirhindi, 57, 59, 61, 62, 125, 163, 165, 166, 167, 168, 169, 170, 171, 172, 173, 174, 176, 178, 225, 229
Ajmer, 15, 65, 67, 68, 69, 72, 73, 76, 100, 133, 145
Ajothan, 75, 76, 81, 82, 83, 84, 145
Akbar, 124, 162, 168, 175
Akhbarul Akhyar, 125
Akhi Siraj, 101
Al Batin, 197
Al Fattah, 197
Al Haqq, 197, 204
Al Zahir, 197
Al-Baihaqi, Al Sunan Al-Kubra, 22
Al-Fath al-rabbani, 109, 117
Al-Futuhat al Makkiyah, 159
Al-Ghazali, 32, 37, 40, 41, 42, 46, 55, 60, 62, 201, 202
Al-Sarraj, 201
Ala al-Din Ali ibn Ahmad Sabir, 102
Alamuddin, 86
Alauddin, 80
Alauddin Khalji, 85, 181
Alauddin Nili, 94
Ali, 14, 24, 63, 199
Ali ibn Haddad, 111
'Ali ibn Yusuf al-Shattanawfi, 118
Ali Ramitini, 155
Alim, 9, 72, 94, 95, 122, 221
Allah, 120
Allah-u- Naziri, 210
Allah-u-Basirun, 208
Allah-u-Hadiri, 210
Allah-u-Mai, 210
Allahu Alimun, 208
Allahu Samiun, 208
Allama Kamaluddin, 102
Amir Hasan Sijzi, 75, 105
Amir Husaini, 143
Amir Khusraw, 213
Amir Khusrow, 88, 89, 90, 105, 161
Amir Kulal, 149
Amir Saifuddin Mahmud, 88
Andalusia, 111
Annapuna, 194
Annemarie Schimmel, 142
Ansh, 217

Aqida, 204
 Arabia, 110
 Arif, 140, 203
 'Arif Riwgari, 154
 Aryan, 217
 Ashab-i Suffa, 8, 221
 Asheat ul Lama'at, 160
 Asia Minor, 111, 143, 179
 Asif Jah, 171
 Aurangzeb, 175
 Awadh, 92, 95, 96
 'Awariful Ma'arif, 84, 93, 134, 147
 'Azizan 'Ali ar-Rimtini, 154

B

Baba Farid, 102, 104, 136, 146
 Babar, 156, 158
 Babar Nama, 158
 Badakhshan, 127
 Badayun, 83, 90, 145
 Badruddin Sulaiman, 80
 Baghdad, 32, 33, 35, 36, 37, 49, 54, 55, 56,
 63, 64, 65, 73, 79, 110, 111, 134, 135
 Bahamani ruler, 123
 Bahauddin, 136
 Bahauddin Zakariya, 70, 73, 86, 139, 145,
 147
 Bahjat al-Asrar, 118
 Bakhtiar Kaki, 104, 148
 Balkh, 26, 50, 51, 64, 88, 127, 186
 Banda Nawaz, 101
 Baqa', 46, 62, 119, 205, 222
 Barakah, 14, 207, 221
 Bareilly, 103
 Basra, 24, 25, 32, 36, 63
 Bayazidal Bastami, 32, 34, 89
 Baz gard, 154
 Bengal, 89, 95, 100, 101, 132, 145, 171
 Bhakti, 101
 Bhukhara, 53, 56, 64, 82, 134, 137, 141,
 149, 150, 152, 155, 159, 178, 180, 181
 Bhule Shah, 213
 Bibi Jamal Khatun, 128
 Bibi Sharifa, 80
 Bidat, 173, 175
 Bihar, 181, 186, 187

Buddhism, 151, 193, 194
 Buddhist, 139, 145, 194
 Burhan-ud-din Gharib, 100, 101
 Burhanpur, 95, 100, 101
 Burhanuddin, 92

C

Cairo, 33, 111
 Caspian Sea, 112
 Central Asia, 53, 64, 73, 82, 88, 111, 127,
 149, 151, 162, 163, 179
 Chanderi, 92, 102
 Chausa, 187
 Chinese Turkestan, 159
 Chiragh-i Dilli, 94, 95, 97, 100
 Chishti order, 15, 45, 54, 57, 63, 66, 73, 75,
 80, 82, 92, 100, 102, 103, 124, 138, 145
 Chishti Rituals, 105, 148
 Chishtis, 134
 Chishtiya, 206
 Christian ascetics, 199
 Christian monks, 198
 Christianity, 193, 194, 196
 Christians, 115
 Companions, 198

D

Daccan, 171
 Dairah, 114, 222
 Damascus, 178
 Dara Shikoh, 127
 Dargahs, 216
 Daulatabad, 90, 91, 94, 95, 96, 101
 Daur, 209, 210, 212
 Dawah, 172
 Deccan, 100, 112, 123
 Delhi, 8, 34, 43, 44, 46, 47, 52, 59, 64, 65,
 66, 69, 71, 73, 74, 75, 76, 79, 81, 83,
 84, 89, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 100,
 103, 118, 120, 125, 127, 131, 132,
 135, 137, 139, 140, 141, 142, 144,
 145, 161, 163, 166, 167, 169, 170,
 180, 181, 182, 186, 196, 198, 209
 Dervish, 27, 48, 49, 51, 54, 63, 71, 72, 83,
 93, 114, 124, 209, 225

Dharb, 208
Dhat, 58
Dhawq, 201
Dhikr, 11, 12, 15, 16, 17, 18, 38, 42, 46, 52,
81, 94, 106, 107, 127, 129, 130, 134,
136, 147, 148, 150, 155, 157, 187,
189, 194, 197, 205, 206, 207, 209,
210, 211, 214, 222, 224, 229

Dhikr bil jehr, 150
Dhikr-i-jali, 107, 206, 207
Dhikr-i-khafi, 206, 207, 208
Dhu'l Nun Misri, 30, 31
Din-i ilahi, 170, 175
Din-panahi, 140
Divine path, 190
Diwan, 82, 143, 144

E

Ego, 120
Egypt, 33, 110, 115, 128, 129, 143, 167, 216

F

Faatihat ash-shabab, 161
Fakhruddin Husain Kashfi, 160
Fakhruddin Ibrahim, 142
Fakhruddin Zarradi, 94, 100
Fana', 42, 46, 62, 119, 205, 222
Fana' fil Haqq, 201
Faqr, 201, 203, 222
Farid, 72, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 93
Farid ud din Attar, 204
Fariduddin, 75, 76, 77, 83, 181
Fariduddin Attar, 26, 27, 34, 37, 40, 49,
185, 204
Fariduddin Ganj-i-Shakar, 100
Farz/Faraiz, 18
Fatawa-i-Tatarkhanian, 181
Fath al-ghayb, 117
Fath al-rabbani, 118
Fatima, 33
Faydi, 168
Feroz Tughlaq, 96
Ferozabad, 163, 166
Fiqh, 51, 64, 83, 109, 132, 152, 168, 181,
200, 223

Firdausi, 180
Firdausiya, 180
Fort of Gwalior, 171
Fusus al-Hikam, 58, 160
Futuh, 59, 69, 104, 223
Futuh al-ghayb, 117, 118, 121, 125
Futuhat al Makk, 58
Fuwaidal Fawad, 78, 86, 90

G

Gabriel, 10
Gaddis, 216
Gautam Buddha, 104
Gesu Daraz, 101, 124
Gharib Nawaz, 68
Ghaus ul Azam, 124, 126
Ghayaspur, 84
Ghayasuddin Tughlaq, 85, 89
Ghazals, 161
Ghazna, 45, 49, 75, 203
Ghiyasuddin Kilji, 70
Ghujduwani, 150
Ghunyat, 120
Ghunyat al-Talibin, 116, 117
Ghurbati, 125
Gilanis, 130
Granada, 111
Great Shaykhs, 100
Gujarat, 94, 100, 101, 102, 112, 144, 145
Gulbarga, 101, 123
Guru, 196
Guru Granth, 196

H

Habs-i-dam, 207, 208
Hadiqat al-Haqiqah, 203
Hadith, 7, 9, 12, 23, 28, 32, 41, 44, 51, 52,
59, 64, 83, 86, 113, 126, 132, 133,
134, 135, 149, 152, 161, 168, 173,
174, 175, 178, 183, 188, 203, 209,
221, 222, 228
Haft Aurang, 160
Hajj, 140
Hal, 202
Halat, 209, 210

Hamadan, 142
 Hama ust, 57
 Hambalite school of Islamic law, 113
 Hamid Qalandar, 97
 Hamiduddin Nagauri, 67, 68, 69, 71, 73, 76, 79, 132, 137, 138, 145
 Hamiduddin Suvali of Nagaur, 67, 100, 145
 Hansi, 76, 82, 92, 93
 Haqiqat, 185, 187, 202
 Harwan, 64
 Harith al Muhasibih, 32, 33
 Hasan Afghan, 142
 Hasan al-Basri, 19, 22, 24, 60, 63
 Hasan Turabi, 219
 Hasanat ul Arifin, 128
 Haveli, 169
 Henri Bergson, 114
 Herat, 152, 159
 Hereafter, 140
 Hijab, 119
 Hilyat al-Auliya, 23, 44
 Hindu, 142, 194, 199
 Hinduwi, 78, 89
 Hinduism, 128, 151, 193
 Hindus, 19, 66, 68, 78, 86, 87, 139
 Hisar, 76
 Hosh dar dam, 153
 Hubayra, 63
 Hujjat Allah al Balighah, 178
 Hujra, 18
 Hulagu, 111
 Humayun, 162
 Husain Nagaur, 68, 71
 Husamuddin, 93, 94, 101, 102, 165, 166
 Huwa, 138

I

Ibn 'Arabi, 57, 58, 59, 61, 62, 102, 116, 126, 133, 147, 159, 160, 165, 173, 174, 177
 Ibn Batuta, 52
 Ibn Khaldun, 21
 Ibn Sina, 62
 Ibn Taimiya, 62
 Ibrahim ibn Adham, 26, 28, 31
 Ibrahim Qanduzi, 63

Idgah, 115
 Ihsan, 9, 10, 16, 223
 Ijtihad, 219
 Ilm, 72, 221
 Ilm-i Safina, 9, 223
 Ilm-i Sina, 9, 223
 'Imaduddin Muhammad Suhrawardi, 134
 Imam Abu Hanifah, 116
 Imam Hasan, 112
 Iman, 9, 10, 223
 India, 8, 15, 34, 36, 44, 47, 54, 55, 56, 57, 63, 67, 69, 80, 82, 88, 100, 110, 111, 112, 119, 120, 123, 127, 128, 130, 134, 141, 145, 146, 159, 162, 163, 165, 167, 170, 177, 178, 179, 180, 187, 206, 226
 Indian Sufis, 125
 Innovations, 173
 Iran, 44, 73, 111, 112, 201, 213
 Iraq, 55
 Iraqi, 142, 147, 185
 Isbat al Nubuwwah, 171
 Ishq-e-majazi, 161, 223
 Ishq-i-haqiqi, 161, 223, 224
 'Ishqiyya, 138
 Islam, 128, 140, 145, 158, 178, 187, 193, 195, 198, 217
 Ismail Rumi, 111
 Istanbul, 111, 179
 Itaah, 9
 Itminan, 202

J

Jahan Ara, 127
 Jahangir, 171, 175
 Jainism, 151, 193
 Jalal, 59, 132, 141
 Jalaluddin Tabrezi, 139
 Jam, 159
 Jamaat khana, 75, 77, 78, 81, 92, 94, 95, 103, 104, 146, 147
 Jamali, 144
 Jamaluddin Hansi, 81, 82
 Jami, 152, 159
 Jedda, 112
 Jerusalem, 135

Jesus, 104
Jewish Kabala, 194
Jews, 115
Jilan, 54, 55, 112
Judaism, 193
Junayd, 32, 33, 35, 36, 46, 50, 55, 63, 204,
205, 213, 214
Jurisprudence, 113, 149
Jurist, 113
Jurists, 108

K

Kabah, 208
Kabul, 75, 162, 163, 171
Kaki, 68, 73, 75, 79, 100, 104, 136, 138,
145
Kalabadhi, 134
Kalima, 107, 206
Kalam, 62
Kalyar, 102
Kamal Kashmiri, 168
Kamaluddin Muhammad Yamani, 134
Kartar, 142
Kashf al Mahjub, 28, 210
Kashghar, 156
Kashmir, 112, 127, 145, 163
Key to Futuh, 125
Khalid Kurdi, 179
Khalifah, 63, 64, 67, 81, 82, 83, 92, 93, 94,
95, 101, 102, 116, 123, 124, 135, 139,
142, 143, 145, 147, 149, 159, 163,
165, 169, 177
Khalifas, 53, 69, 75, 81, 86, 91, 92, 100,
124, 132, 137, 145
Khalilullah, 123
Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, 7, 68, 175
Khalwah, 16, 130
Khalwat dar anjuman, 153
Khan-i-Jahan, 171
Khan-i-Khanan, 171
Khandesh, 95
Khandesh dynasty, 101
Khanqah, 48, 54, 55, 57, 74, 100, 102, 112,
123, 124, 125, 132, 133, 134, 135,
136, 139, 141, 143, 145, 146, 153,
164, 166, 182, 186, 224

Khanqahs, 46, 216, 218
Khartum, 112
Khatimat al Hayat, 161
Khawf, 202
Khilafat nama, 57, 82, 84, 91, 92, 93
Khiradnama-i Iskandari, 160
Khirqa, 97, 127, 169, 170
Khiva, 159
Khulasatul Alfaz Jamiul-Ulum, 142
Khurasan, 50, 54, 56, 63, 134, 142, 159
Khwaja, 159
Khwaja Abd al Khaliq Ghujdawani, 152
Khwaja Abdul Khaliq bin Abul Jamil, 152
Khwaja Abu Yaqub Yusuf al-Hamadani, 152
Khwaja Bahauddin Naqshband, 149, 154,
162
Khwaja Baqi Billah, 162, 166, 169
Khwaja Husamuddin Ahmad, 165
Khwaja Kalan, 165, 166
Khwaja Khurd, 165
Khwaja Mahmud Shashi, 156
Khwaja Mir Dard, 178, 179
Khwaja Muhammad Parsa, 155
Khwaja Najibuddin Firdausi, 181
Khwaja Nasiruddin Ubaidullah Ahrar, 163
Khwaja Saiduddin Kashghari, 159
Khwaja Ubaidullah Ahrar, 156
Khwajah Bahauddin Naqshband, 159
Khwajah Banda Nawaz, 101
Khwajah Ibrahim, 156
Khwajah Ubaidullah Ahrar, 159
Khwajah Yusuf Hamadani, 114
Khwarizm, 54, 55, 56, 57, 155
Kirman, 123
Kitab al-Luma' fi'l Tasawwuf, 201
Kitab al-Ta'aru fil madhhab ahl al-tasawwuf,
212
Knowledge, 9, 14, 33, 34, 35, 38, 42, 51,
53, 59, 64, 65, 70, 72, 105, 109, 113,
114, 116, 122, 126, 149, 150, 151,
159, 163, 168, 170, 171, 185, 188,
190, 191, 192, 196, 198, 202, 203,
211, 212, 221, 223, 224, 225, 226
Konia, 51, 52, 143
Kubrawiya, 180
Kunuz'l Fawa'id, 140

Kushk-i Arifan, 149
Kushk-i-Hinduwan, 149

L

La ilaha illAllah, 208
Laddakh, 145
Lahore, 26, 27, 34, 40, 42, 45, 49, 64, 66,
69, 75, 118, 125, 126, 127, 163, 201,
204, 206
Lakhnauti, 95, 139
Lal Qalandas, 62
Langar, 87, 224
Lawa'ih, 79, 138, 146
Lawam'e, 160
Layla va Majnun, 160
Litany, 206
Literature, 113
Ludhiana, 130

M

Ma'arifah, 200, 202, 221, 224
Mablagh al Rijal, 165
Ma'danul Ma'ani, 187
Madinah, 8, 12, 24, 112, 134, 221
Madrasa, 37, 54, 55, 103, 109, 110, 114,
115, 132, 133, 135, 142, 159, 179
Mahabat Khan, 171
Mahabba, 224
Mahabbah, 34, 202, 224
Mahmud, 80, 102, 103, 144, 158
Mahmud Anjir Faghnavi, 154
Mahmuda, 208
Majaalis, 94, 97, 98
Majma ul Bahrain, 128
Majzub, 63, 225
Makhdum-i Jahaniyan, 145
Makkah, 36, 112, 118, 125, 134, 143, 167,
197, 209
Maktubat Rabbani, 177
Maktubat-e-Mujaddid, 176
Malfuzaat, 67, 77, 90, 94, 140, 141, 224
Malikzada, 186
Malwa, 72, 80, 101, 102, 171
Mana'iq ul Asfiya, 185
Mandu, 102
Maner, 182

Maqamat, 33, 200, 201
Marw, 152
Masnavi, 49, 50, 52, 89, 143, 144, 159, 160,
213, 225
Maulana, 49, 57, 75
Maulana Alauddin Nili, 92
Maulana Burhanuddin Gharib, 92
Maulana Fakhruddin Zarradi, 91, 92
Maulana Husamuddin of Multan, 92
Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi, 32, 50, 57, 185
Maulana Khalid Kurdi, 178
Maulana Mughith, 102
Maulana Mughith-ud-din, 101
Maulana Muwayyid ud din, 100
Maulana Nizamuddin, 186
Maulana Rumi, 213
Maulana Sadruddin, 187
Maulana Shamsuddin, 92
Maulana Wajihuddin Yusuf, 92
Mawlana Nur ud din Abdur Rahman Jami,
159
Meditation, 75, 77, 80, 83, 84, 88, 96, 97,
99, 104, 107, 134, 146, 166, 193, 194,
195, 196, 197, 198, 199, 200, 202,
205, 209, 210, 211, 214, 216, 222,
225, 226
Merv, 159
Mesopotamia, 115
Miftah-i Futuh, 125
Mimshad Dinwari, 63
Minhajuddidn Tirmizi, 75
Mir Muhammad, 126
Mir Nurullah, 123
Mir-e-Delhi, 140
Mirza Mazhar Jan-i Janan, 178, 179
Mirza Muhammad Hakim, 162
Miyan Mir, 119, 126
Mongols, 51, 53, 73, 136, 137, 159
Morocco, 110, 130
Mosque, 169
Mubarak Ghaznavi, 139
Mubarak Shah, 85
Mufti, 116
Mughal, 175
Mughal Empire, 162
Mughals, 111

Muhaddith, 103, 131, 134, 167
 Muhammad Abdus Samad, 111
 Muhammad Baba as-Samasi, 154
 Muhammad bin Tughlaq, 71, 80, 86, 91, 94,
 96, 101, 141, 182
 Muhammad Ghauri., 64
 Muhammad Ghawth, 112
 Muhammad Masum, 176, 177, 178
 Muhammad Sadiq, 176
 Muhammad Said, 176
 Muhammad Yahya, 176
 Muharrar, 130
 Muhibbullah Sadrupuri, 102
 Muhiuddin Kashani, 92, 100
 Muinuddin Chishti, 15, 45, 63, 67, 69, 70,
 72, 73, 74, 100, 104, 116, 133
 Mujaddadiya, 170
 Mujaddid, 125, 170, 172, 225
 Mujtahid, 177
 Mukharrimi, 114
 Mulhimat, 82
 Mulla, 93
 Mulla Shah, 127
 Mulla Shah Badakhshani, 119
 Multan, 70, 73, 75, 77, 93, 124, 132, 134,
 135, 136, 137, 139, 140, 141, 142,
 143, 144, 145
 Murad, 178
 Muraqaba, 209, 210, 214
 Murdiya, 219
 Murid, 16, 42, 149, 200, 225
 Murshid, 14, 50, 93, 196, 200, 225, 226
 Murtaza Khan, 175
 Mushahada, 202
 Muslim Brotherhood, 219
 Muslims, 187, 211, 218
 Muzaffar, 186
 Mystics, 108

N

Naf-i-asbat, 207, 209
 Nafahaat al-uns, 160
 Nafil/Nawafil, 17, 18, 19, 29, 225
 Nafs, 46, 88, 184, 225
 Nagaur, 100, 138, 145, 146
 Najibuddin Matawakkil, 81, 83

Najmuddin Kubra, 56, 133, 180
 Nam japna, 194
 Namaz, 136, 142, 214
 Naqdun nusur, 160
 Naqshband, 149
 Naqshbandi, 159, 210
 Naqshbandi order, 160, 162
 Naqshbandiyas, 152, 170, 206, 217, 219
 Nasihat-namah, 152
 Nasir Khan Faruqi, 101
 Nasira, 208
 Nasiruddin, 80, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100,
 101, 102
 Nasiruddin Mahmud, 95, 96
 National Unionist party, 219
 Nawab Murtaza Khan, 164
 Nazar bar qadam, 153
 Ni'amatabad, 123
 Nif, 112
 Nigah dasht, 154
 Nigeria, 218
 Nile Valley, 111
 Nishapur, 33, 44, 49, 64
 Nizam el Mulk, 37
 Nizam Madni, 182
 Nizamiyyah College, 112
 Nizamuddin, 96
 Nizamuddin Auliya, 29, 77, 89, 91, 92,
 93, 95, 100, 102, 104, 138, 145,
 148, 182
 Noor Jahan, 171
 Nur un Nabi, 72
 Nuzuhatu'ul arwah, 144

O

Orthodoxy, 12
 Ottoman Empire, 111

P

Pakpatan, 100
 Pantheism, 119
 Pas-i-anas, 107, 129, 207, 208, 225
 Patience, 204
 Persia, 34, 35, 42, 47, 56, 115, 123, 159,
 161, 165

Pious Caliphs, 198
 Pir, 14, 42, 94, 97, 101, 118, 125, 126, 127,
 132, 147, 166, 170, 182, 209, 225,
 226
 Pir-o-murid, 198
 Pir-o-murshid, 203
 Pirs, 157, 196, 216, 218
 Professor Browne, 161
 Prophet Muhammad, 116, 120, 177, 199,
 203
 Punjab, 75, 100, 103, 112, 123, 124, 168
 Purification, 13, 147, 148, 176, 184, 189,
 190, 215, 224, 228

Q

Qadi, 24, 76, 79, 83, 135, 138, 187
 Qadi Abu Said Mubarak al-Mukharrimi, 114,
 115
 Qadi Muhyiuddin Kashani, 100
 Qadri, 110, 111, 118, 119, 123, 124, 125,
 127, 128, 130, 167, 170, 206, 218
 Qadri Order, 108, 110, 167, 170
 Qadriya, 206
 Qadriyas, 219
 Qalandar, 64, 77, 97, 147, 182
 Qalb, 208
 Qawwali, 213
 Qayyum, 177
 Qazi Hamiduddin Nagori, 146
 Qazi Muhiuddin Kashani, 92
 Qazi Nizamuddin Badakhshi, 165
 Qibla, 184
 Qunduz, 165
 Qur'an, 12, 22, 60, 149, 160, 166, 168,
 173, 174, 175, 176, 179, 187, 195,
 197, 199, 202, 205, 209, 229, 210,
 212, 213, 221
 Qurb, 202, 226
 Qutab-e-Alam, 101
 Qutbuddin Aibak, 64
 Qutbuddin Bakhtiar Kaki, 68, 73, 75, 100,
 102, 136, 138, 180
 Qutbuddin Kashani, 135

R

Rabia Basri, 23, 25, 28, 31, 66, 157
 Rabi'ath sani, 130
 Radd-e-Rawafiz, 171
 Ramadan, 10, 147, 148
 Raqs, 212
 Rashahat-i 'Ainul Hayat, 152, 160
 Renunciation, 8, 19, 21, 27, 71, 72, 87, 148,
 184, 191, 201, 224, 227
 Revelations, 9, 109, 117
 Ribat, 109, 111, 115, 133, 134, 224, 226
 Richana, 145
 Rida, 201, 204
 Rija, 202
 Risala Min Kalam, 138
 Risala-i Haqq-numa, 128
 Risala-i Sahibiyah, 152
 Risala-i Tariqat, 152
 Risala-i Walidiyyah, 158
 Roorkee, 82
 Rosary, 193, 218
 Rubaiyat, 47
 Rudawli, 102
 Ruknuddin Abul Fath, 141
 Ruzbihan al Baqli, 133

S

Sabiriyya, 100, 102, 103
 Sabr, 201
 Sadr us Sudur, 140
 Sadruddin Arif, 142
 Safa, 13
 Safar dar Watan, 153
 Safavids, 111
 Safinat ul Auliya, 128
 Sahl ibn Abdullah al Tustani, 206
 Saifuddin Sa'id Bakharzi, 180
 Saiyid Husain, 91
 Sakinat ul Auliya, 126, 128
 Salik, 13, 14, 16, 147, 148, 153, 184, 187,
 201, 202, 207, 225, 226, 227
 Salman Farsi, 152
 Sama, 42, 46, 48, 74, 75, 79, 85, 86, 89, 90,
 107, 134, 136, 144, 148, 166, 181,
 212, 213, 224, 226

Samadhi, 194
 Samarqand, 53, 64, 150, 156, 159, 163, 180
 Sambhal, 163
 Samudara Sangam, 128
 Sanad, 135
 Sanskrit, 102, 128
 Sarraj, 134
 Satan, 185
 Sayyed Ahmad Shahid, 178
 Sayyed Muhammad ibn Yusuf al Husayni, 101
 Sayyed Nuruddin Mubarak Ghaznavi, 139
 Sayyed Sadr Jahan, 171
 Sayyid Amir Kulal al-Bukhari, 154
 Sayyid Ashraf Jahangir Simnani, 101
 Sayyid Hasan, 100, 102
 Sayyid Jalaluddin Bukhari, 141
 Sayyid Muhammad Makhdum Gilani, 112
 Sayyid Nur Qutub-i 'Alam, 101
 Sayyid Sikandar Qadri, 170
 Senegal, 219
 Shab-i Barat, 142
 Shah Abdul Aziz, 178
 Shah Abul Ma'ali, 125
 Shah Abu'l-Ma'ali Qadri, 118
 Shah Ghulam Ali, 178, 179
 Shah Jahan, 125
 Shah Kalimullah Jahanabadi, 103
 Shah Latif, 213
 Shah Nematullah Wali, 123
 Shah Nizamuddin, 103
 Shah Rafiuddin, 179
 Shah Waliullah, 151, 166, 178, 179
 Shahabuddin Suhrawardi, 209
 Shahadah, 16, 226
 Shams ud-Din Yahya, 100
 Shamshuddin, 186
 Shamsuddin Iltutmish, 73, 135, 140
 Shamsuddin Tabriz, 51
 Shamsuddin Yahya, 92
 Sharafuddin Abu Tawwama, 181
 Sharafuddin Ahmad Yahya Maneri, 181, 187, 189, 192
 Shariah, 23, 33, 67, 70, 72, 79, 105, 108, 125, 137, 140, 151, 162, 173, 175, 176, 184, 185, 187, 189, 196, 217, 227
 Shariat, 204
 Shattanawfi, 114
 Shattariya, 162
 Shauq, 202
 Shaykh, 14, 15, 16, 64, 76, 81, 83, 88, 134
 Shaykh Abd al Qadri Sani, 124
 Shaykh Abdul Haqq Dehlawi, 164
 Shaykh Abdul Haqq Muhaddith, 118, 131
 Shaykh 'Abdul Haqq Muhaddith, 141
 Shaykh Abdul Qadir, 112, 121, 124, 128
 Shaykh Abdul Qadr Jilani, 123
 Shaykh Abul Ma'ali, 125
 Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi, 164, 165, 175, 177
 Shaykh Akhi Sirajuddin Usman, 92
 Shaykh al Haddad, 165
 Shaykh Alauddin bin Asad, 101
 Shaykh Bahauddin, 135
 Shaykh Bahauddin Zakariya, 126, 132, 136, 146, 148
 Shaykh Barak Allah, 101
 Shaykh Dawud, 124
 Shaykh Dawud Kirmani, 112
 Shaykh Farid, 175
 Shaykh Hamid, 124
 Shaykh Hamid-ud-din, 102
 Shaykh Husamuddin Multani, 100
 Shaykh Jalaluddin Tabrizi, 148
 Shaykh Kamal-ud-din, 101
 Shaykh Kamaluddin, 102
 Shaykh Khizr, 126
 Shaykh Muhammad al Husaini al Jilani, 124
 Shaykh Musa, 124
 Shaykh Najibuddin Firdausi, 182
 Shaykh Najibuddin Suhrawardi, 116
 Shaykh Nasiruddin Chiragh, 102
 Shaykh Nasiruddin Mahmud Chiragh, 92
 Shaykh Nasruddin, 107
 Shaykh Nizamuddin, 106
 Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya, 182
 Shaykh Qutbuddin Munawwar, 92
 Shaykh Ruknuddin, 141
 Shaykh Sadruddin, 140
 Shaykh Sharafuddin Abu Tawamma, 181
 Shaykh Shihabuddin Suhrawardi, 135
 Shaykh Siraj-ud-din Usman, 101
 Shaykh Sultan of Thanesar, 168
 Shaykh Ubaidullah Ahrar, 165

Shaykh ul Islam, 136, 141
 Shaykh Wajih-ud-din Yusuf, 101, 102
 Shaykh Zain-ud-din, 101
 Sher Khan, 77
 Shihabuddin Ahmad I, 123
 Shihabuddin Suhrawardi, 46, 55, 90, 132,
 133, 134, 135, 137, 138, 139, 145, 209
 Shiism, 171
 Sijistan, 63
 Sikhism, 194, 196
 Silsila, 14, 63, 64, 68, 69, 70, 100, 102, 110,
 149, 152, 166, 169, 200, 205
 Silsilah-e-Khwajagan, 149, 152
 Silsilat az zahb, 160
 Simran, 194
 Simurgh, 50
 Sindi, 126
 Siraj-ud-din, 100
 Sirr-i Akbar, 128
 Sistan, 123
 Siyar al-Arifin, 67
 Sokoto, 112
 Solomon's Seal, 129
 Spirit, 119
 Spiritual exercises, 19, 64, 80, 88, 110, 140,
 149, 186, 222, 225
 Srinagar, 127
 Stages of Sufism, 44
 Study, 149
 Subhan Allah, 206
 Subhat al asrar, 161
 Sudan, 219
 Sufi, 7, 8, 12, 111, 112, 114, 116, 125, 126,
 132, 133, 134, 136, 137, 138, 141,
 143, 144, 145, 146, 147, 149, 150,
 152, 153, 155, 159, 160, 162, 163,
 164, 165, 169, 170, 173, 175, 179,
 180, 183, 185, 187, 193, 198, 199,
 200, 201, 202, 203, 205, 206, 207,
 208, 210, 211, 212, 213, 216, 217,
 218, 219, 220, 221, 222, 224, 225,
 226, 227
 Sufis, 108, 128, 133, 135, 177, 192, 211,
 216
 Sufism, 128, 160, 187, 196, 199, 204, 205,
 211, 215, 218

Suhraward, 133
 Suhrawardi, 141
 Suhrawardi order, 136, 137, 180
 Suhrawardis, 134
 Sultan Alauddin Khilji, 92
 Sultan Balban, 181
 Sultan Firoz, 183
 Sultan Firoz Shah Tughlaq, 181
 Sultan Iltutmish, 137
 Sultan Nasir Khan Faruqi, 95
 Sultan Sanjar, 122
 Sultan Sikandar, 144
 Sultan Tughlaq, 186
 Sultan Zainu'l 'Abidin, 145
 Sunargaon, 182
 Sunnah, 119, 177, 185
 Surus us Sudur, 67, 71
 Syria, 33, 63, 111, 143, 179

T

Tadhkirat ul-Auliya, 26, 27, 34, 40, 49, 204,
 206, 214, 241
 Tafakkur, 209
 Tafriid, 184
 Tafsir, 24, 178
 Taj, 129
 Tajrid, 184
 Tajuddin Sambhali, 167
 Takiyah, 111
 Takiyas, 179
 Talib, 14, 50, 63, 203
 Talim-i-Salik, 165
 Tamhid, 84
 Tanzih, 59
 Tashbih, 57
 Taqwa, 85
 Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi, 90
 Tariqa, 13, 14, 33, 46, 70, 79, 96, 112, 140,
 184, 185, 187, 189, 196, 200, 201,
 228
 Tariqas, 219
 Tasawwuf, 7, 9, 11, 41, 42, 43, 107, 109,
 159, 164, 168, 173, 196, 197, 201,
 215, 216, 217, 227, 228
 Tasbih, 16, 193, 207
 Tashkand, 159

Tashkent, 156
Taslim, 74
Tatar Khan, 181
Tauhid, 134, 204, 209
Tawakkul, 126, 204
Tawali' al Shumus, 138
Tawba, 106, 147, 187, 189, 228
Tawhid, 58, 60, 173, 174, 185, 187, 228
Tawiz, 77, 228
Thakur, 142
Theravada, 194
Timurid, 159
Timurids, 155
Tripoli, 112
Tuhfat-ul-Ahrar, 159, 160
Turab, 97
Turkey, 51, 128, 179, 217, 220

U

Ubaidullah Ahrar, 162
Ubaydullah, 164, 177
Uch, 123, 141
Ulama, 34, 72, 74, 79, 85, 90, 94, 96, 107,
126, 135, 155, 162, 168
Umar bin Abdul Aziz, 24
Umar Farooq, 9, 10
Umar Khayyam, 49
Umar Shaykh Mirza, 158
Umayyad Caliphs, 24, 199
Ummi, 197
Uns, 202
Upanishads, 128
Ush, 73
Usman Harwani, 64
Uttar Pradesh, 100, 101
Uzbeks, 158

V

Vasatul'iqd, 161
Vedanta philosophy, 173
Vipasana, 194

W

Wadifas, 97
Wahadat al shuhud, 166, 173
Wahdat al wujud, 126, 127, 128, 147, 165,
185
Wajd, 212
Wajihuddin Yusuf, 92
Wara', 201, 203
Way, 188, 204
Wird, 16, 229
Wujud al haqq, 59
Wujud Asli, 174, 226, 229
Wujud Zilli, 174, 226, 229
Wuquf-i-adadi, 154, 229
Wuquf-i-Qalbi, 154, 229
Wuquf-i-Zamani, 154, 229

Y

Yad dasht, 154
Yad kard, 154
Yahya, 43, 92, 100, 104, 176, 181, 182,
187
Yaqin, 202
Yaqub Kashmiri, 168
Yarhin, 130
Yoga, 194
Yogic, 217
Yogic practices, 173
Yogis, 99, 148

Z

Zahid, 7, 203
Zainabad, 101
Zakat, 10, 79, 117
Zamindars, 139
Zawiyahs, 112, 114, 218
Zen, 194
Ziauddin Barni, 90, 140
Zuhd, 201, 203

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