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## Evolution of "Sufism" in the Indian Subcontinent

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### Abstract

This research paper aims to provide an overview of the evolution of Sufism in Indian subcontinent and to present its effects and results in the various disciplines that have arisen as a result in a research manner. It turns out that the history of spirituality is as old as the history of religion. Spirituality is very difficult to define, but it usually means attachment to sacred beings or concepts, spiritual experiences and observations based on reason and feeling, meditation, compassion and self-control. Similarly in Indian subcontinent. Sufism has a history of over a thousand years. . Sunni personalities and legends have brought peace and encouragement to most Hindu caste communities in rural India. The Sufi teachings of divine spirituality, cosmic harmony, love and humanity resonate with ordinary people and continue to do so today. The following content will take a thematic approach to discuss the thousands of influences that helped spread Sufism and a mystical understanding of Islam, making India a contemporary center of Sufi culture today. The key points of this research are that it will enable readers to understand the reality of Sufism with a concept of spirituality

**Keywords:** Evolution, Sufism, Indian subcontinent, Ideologies, Scriptures.

The history of Islam witnessed the success of Sufis in the promotion of love, peace, harmony, and brotherhood. Sufi masters strengthened interfaith relations, mended the broken hearts, and sung the songs of divine love without disturbing the peace of society. Farid al-Din Mas'ud Ganj-i-Shakar, better known as simply Baba Farid, was also one of those greatest saints of India who spent their lives for the betterment of the community. He belongs to Chishti order of Sufis which earns its fame for its emphasis on love, tolerance, and openness. In order to understand him, it is necessary to first understand Sufi ideology, its transmission, and the context in which it was developed and evolved especially in the Indian Subcontinent. It should be taken into consideration that regarding the authenticity of Sufism, scholars are divided into at least three groups. The first group considers Sufism as an inevitable part of Islam whereas the second group presents Sufism as an entirely separate system that is far away from the teachings of Islam. The third group considers some of its teachings as a part of Islam and others as heresies. Each of them provides substantial evidence to prove their arguments. The aim of this work is not to discuss the lengthy debates on the authenticity of Sufism but to present an introduction to Sufi thought as elaborated by the Sufi masters. To achieve this goal, preference is given to the classical works on Sufism. Though this introduction is not exhaustive, it adequately explains the beginning of Sufism, its history, and transmission.

### **Origin of Sufism:**

It is not clear when, why, and in which meanings the term Sufi was first used.<sup>1</sup> Many in the East and West think Sufism as a phenomenon which, for them, is somewhat separate from

Islam. Some even from the Muslims conclude that Sufism presents a distorted picture of Islam.<sup>2</sup> Though this word earns its fame near the end of second century Hijri, advocates of Sufism argue that it does not necessarily mean that Sufism is something different from Islam. A discussion of Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī<sup>3</sup> (986-1072) on this issue reveals that the case of word "Sufi" is much similar to the terms such as faqih, mufassir, or muhadith in the Islamic thought. During the time of Prophet Muhammad (SAW), his followers, no matter how skillful they were in Fiqh, Tafsir or Hadith, were not recognized by such terms. They earned the title of sahabi for, besides prophet, sahabi was and is the highest degree of nobility among Muslims. However, later, when Islam spread to the various parts of the world, an era of heresies and insurgencies erupted among the Muslim. It was the time when a group of people dedicated themselves to follow the commandments of Almighty Allah. That group started using the term Sufism for it. Consequently, the term Sufi emerged and became famous before the start of second century Hijri.<sup>4</sup>

### **Defining Sufism:**

In general, the term Sufi is used for a person who articulates the ways of and to God. Junayd Baghdadi (835-910), the famous Persian Sufi saint, explains Sufism as the eradication of veils between God and man. Another Sufi master, Abu Sulayman al-Darani (758-830), thinks that Sufism is the training of bearing of sufferings as a part of God's plan. Additionally, it trains to renounce everything but Allah. Al-Tusi writes that according to Muhammad bin Ali al-Qassab (died 970), Tasawwuf is the name of all those noble actions and practices that were performed by the Prophet Muhammad in a noble era in

front of the noble people.<sup>5</sup> Regarding Sufism, Baba Farid adds that Suf (wool) is the dress of prophets and saints. This dress is not permissible for those whose inner and outer self is polluted because Sufi is a person who is purified from the contaminations of the world.

### **Mission of Sufis:**

Al-Tusi writes that the ultimate purpose of a Sufi is to be one with Allah (SWT).<sup>6</sup> Many Sufi masters think that the beginning of Sufism is knowledge. Its midpoint is practice and end is the blessings of God. Moreover, it is also added that vision and closeness of God is the wish of Sufis for which they are willing to sacrifice everything. Hujwiri notes that a Sufi sees no one other than Allah and thus, s/he relates none with Him.<sup>7</sup> Rabia al-Adawiyya (718-801) (Rabia of Basra), a famous Sufi saint and poet of the eighth century, once said that she wants people to worship their Lord, not for the sake of paradise or not because of the fear of hell but only to achieve His love. Therefore, Sufi is also known as a lover and being a lover, there is a sheer force of love behind her/his every deed.

### **Islam and Sufism in India:**

Although trade and commerce between Arabs and Hindus made it possible for Muslims to enter in the Indian subcontinent during the era of Prophet Muhammad, Muslim soldiers also played an important role in the spread of Islam as well. They were not direct agents of conversion, but their presence provided an opportunity for Muslim merchants to travel freely in the Indian subcontinent. Lewis Ray Rambo thinks that "[t]hrough intermarriage and the establishment of Muslim institutions, the conversion process was initiated." It argued that Sindh provided

the route to both Sufis and soldiers to enter in the Indian subcontinent. Meetings of Sufis such as "Abu Ali Sindhi and Abu Yazid Bustami during ninth century and work of Hussain al-Hallaj in the tenth century strengthen the bases of Indian Sufism"<sup>8</sup> that later developed into various Sufi salāsīl (singular silsila means chain).

### **Major Sufi Orders in the Indian Subcontinent:**

The institutional form of Tasawwuf is called silsila, ṭarīqah (method or guide), or Sufi order which is regarded as the third stage of the development of Sufism.<sup>9</sup> It is called a silsila because of the chain that began from a specific Sufi master and linked back to the Prophet Muhammad. It is called a ṭarīqah because of the specific method that one adopts to fulfill his/her spiritual journey. There is an abundance of Sufi order in the Indian subcontinent which is generally categorized into two main types:

1. Salāsīl such as Mdariyaa, Shatariyya, and Mujaddiyya that emerged and evolved in India and spread to the rest of the world.
2. Salāsīl such as Qadiriyya, Naqshbandiyya, Chishtiyya, and Suhrawardiyya that emerged elsewhere and later came to in the Indian subcontinent.<sup>10</sup>

Shah Waliullah (1703-1762) noted that during his time, Qadiriyya order was famous in Arabia and India. Naqshbandiyya in Mecca, Madinah, India, and Transoxiana. Chishtiyya and Shatariyya in India and Suhrawardiyya in Khurasan, Kashmir, and around Sindh. All these orders trace their spiritual genealogy back to the Prophet Muhammad through Sahaba. In this connection, Naqshbandi order traces its

spiritual genealogy to the Prophet through the first caliph of Muslims, Abu Bakar, and rest of the orders through Ali Ibn Talib, the fourth caliph of Muslims.

### **Silsila Qadiriyya:**

Silsila Qadriyya is regarded as one of the oldest order of Sufism. It is attributed towards Abdul Qadir Gilani. His vast knowledge earned him an unparalleled fame that inspired millions of people to follow his path. He emerged at a time when a big part of Muslim Ummah, due to their internal conflicts and materialistic policies, involved itself in the worldly affairs. He spent 25 years wandering in the deserts of Iraq thinking to resolve the disputes of his fellow Muslims. He was such an effective preacher who not only converted a large number of people including Christians, Jews, and Magians but also taught a number of Muslims to follow the teachings of Islam. His speeches mostly consisted upon the topics such as love of God, following of the Holy Quran and Sunnah, and Tawakkul (faith in God's plan). This order earned its fame mainly because of its balanced approach and its emphasis on tolerance.<sup>11</sup>

### **Suborders:**

Followers of Qadiriyya order claim that this order reached to Indian Subcontinent during the life of Gilani. According to some traditions, Abdul Razzaq, the elder son of Gilani, visited India and stayed there for a while. Later, the Sufis of India kept inviting the descendants of Gilani to the Indian subcontinent. Twarikh Aina-e-Tasawuf, first published in 1891, provides names of Qadriyya suborders in India which include Mustafiyya Jaddiyaa, Azeemiyya, Nizamiyaa Razzaiqyaa, Muhammadiyya, Rasulnumaiyya, Masudiyya, Anaitiyya Qudussiyya

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Durvashiyya, Mujaddidiyah Qudussiyya Chishtiyya Suhrawardiyya Kbiri, Suhrawardiyya Kabrviyya, Sadiqiyya Mahbubiyya, Badriyya Asghari, Jaddiyaa Mujaddidiyya Hasniyya, Nizamiyya Hasniyya, Nizamiyya A'bdiyya Hasniyya, Hasni Asghari, and Hasniyya A'mliyya Awradiyya.<sup>12</sup>

**Teachings:**

Most of the practices of this order are taken from Futuh al-ghaib and Ghunyat-ut-Talibeen which are credited to Gilani. Both of these works largely teach about the manners of the love of God, His innovations, travel, dressing, and meeting with others, basic rules of Islam, ethical morality, and Tawakkul. This order stresses to learn the basics of Islam. It makes obligatory to understand important fiqhi matters regarding the daily life and recitation of the Holy Quran. According to Abul Hasan Ali Hasani Nadwi (1914-1999), Gilani's teachings are away from rahbaniyah (monasticism). He allows his mureeden to be benefited from worldly pleasures according to the needs and wants of an individual. However, along with that he also forbids to get absorbed in the worldly affairs and becoming the slave of the world. It is argued that there is a vast difference between the teachings of Silsila Qadriyya in the various parts of the world. However, generally, it focuses on Dhikr in which sometimes specific phrases such as names of God are repeatedly recited either loudly or silently. However, it is also written by Sufi masters of this Silsila that conception of Shaikh is better than Dhikr. Because through it, mureed will get connected to God. Strengthening relation with Shaikh will result in the intensification of love with God. Therefore, it is necessary for mureed to get annihilated in Shaikh for it will lead her/him towards God.<sup>13</sup>

### **Silsila Naqshbandiyya:**

Silsila Naqshbandiyya is one of the oldest and influential salāsils of the Indian subcontinent. It is often argued that teachings of the prominent Sufis masters including Abu Yazid Bustami and Junayd Baghdadi manifest in the traditions of Naqshbandiyya order. The Efforts of Abdul Khaliq Ghijduvani (died 1179) played an essential role in its systemization and spread. He introduced silent forms of dhikr and constituted its principles. Central Asia was its main center from where it flourished to the rest of the world. It earned its fame because of its "characteristic combination of strict adherence to the divine law and active involvement in social and political affairs." Baha-ud-Din Naqshband (1318-1389) was the seventh Khawaja of this order. The impact of his work was so enormous that only because of his name, this order started identifying itself as Naqshbandiyya. Similar to Gilani, he also spent a part of his life as a wandering ascetic. The difference was that Gilani opted for the deserts of Iraq to quench his spiritual thirst whereas Naqshband preferred shrines and khanaqahs of Bukhara to find his spiritual destiny. Though he learned the ceremonies of Tasawwuf from Amir Kulal (died 1371), he is said to be spiritually trained by Ghijduvani himself. In the seventh century, Ahmad al-Sirhindi (1564-1624), the founder of Mujaddidiyya branch, provided the intellectual basis for this order. Mujaddidiyya offshoot received enormous success in India. The charismatic personality of Al-Sirhindi proved vital in the spread of this order. His mission was to lead his followers to adopt the path of the Prophet. Therefore, it is claimed that "[f]or Mujaddidis the path outlined by Sirhind; is nothing more and nothing less than the path of the Prophet."<sup>14</sup>



**Suborders:**

Historically, the naming process of Naqshbandiyya offshoot of Sufism seems more complex in comparison to other Sufi orders. Some scholars reported that due to its strong link with Abu Bakr Siddique, in its very beginning, this order was known as Siddiqiyya. From Bustami to Ghijduvani, it adopted the title of Tyfuriyya. The leadership of Baha-ud-Din Naqshband earned it the title of Naqshbandiyya and finally, it was started known as Naqshbandiyya Mujaddidiyya due to the vast impact of Sirhind. According to another tradition, in earlier times this order was identified as Silsila Khawajgān or the chain of the masters mainly because of the impact first six Khawajas of this order. It is also divided into two types on the bases of its spiritual lineage: From the Prophet to the founder and from the founder to the Shaikh. The former is called Dahbiyya (golden) and the later, is known as Tarbiyyah (training/upbringing).<sup>15</sup> Twarikh Aina-e-Tasawuf tells about its 14 suborders that include Sudniyya Mujadidiyya, Quddusiyya, Quddusiyya Ismailiyaa, Azeemiyya, Dariyya, Abdiyya, Siddiqiyya Mujaddidiyya, Junaydiyya, Barkhurdariyya Mujaddidiyya, Abdiyya Karimiyya, Dargaiyya Abu al-Ulaiyya, Azeemiyya Abu al-Ulaiyya, Hasniyya Jananiyya, and Hasniyya Mujaddidiyya.

**Teachings:**

This silsila has specified a curriculum that includes various sorts of dhikrs, mujahidias, and muraqabahs. Naqshbandi Sufis emphasize that mureed should go through these practices under the supervision of the Shaikh. However, it is also written by some Sufi master that if somehow

companionship of Shaikh is not possible than mureed must recite 8 pages from the treaties of Sufis daily. Unlike Qadiriyya order, Naqshbandi Sufis favor the silent form of dhikr. Shah Waliullah reports that prior to Naqshband when this order was known as Silsila Khawajgān, loud dhikr was common. However, Naqshband preferred silent form of dhikr whereas Amir Kulal focused on both salient and loud form of dhikr. In this connection, Shaikh Ikram (1908-1973) writes that Naqshbandi Sufis are against loud dhikr. They are against Sima' and music as well. They mainly focus on following the commandments of Sharia. Shaikh prefers to sit among the mureeden rather than in isolation.

### **Silsila Suhrawardiyya:**

Suhrawardiyya is attributed to Abu 'n-Najib as-Suhrawardi (1097-1168 CE) and his nephew Shahab al-Din Suhrawardi whose Awarif ul-Maarif is regarded as the leading work on Sufism among Suhrawardi Sufis in specific and other Sufi orders in general. It is written in Fawaid-ul-Fawad that Nizamuddin Auliya (1238-1325) learned 5 chapters of Awarif ul-Maarif from Baba Farid. He adds that Baba Farid used to teach this book with so accuracy and beauty that people wish to die while learning it from him. Baba Farid also named one of his sons after Shahab al-Din. Shahab al-Din got his education as well as Khilafat from his uncle Abu 'n-Najib as-Suhrawardi. Furthermore, he also got the opportunity to be spiritually trained by Gilani, Ghazali, and Khidr as well. Apart from Awarif ul-Maarif, he authored 23 books on Sufism. Regarding him, once Gilani said that he would be the last among the famous personalities of Iraq.<sup>16</sup> His message was spread in the Indian subcontinent through his famous Khalifa, Baha-ud-Din Zakariya

Multani, who learned the mysteries of Sufism in just 17 days from him and became the founder of Suhrawardiyya order in the Indian subcontinent. He was appointed in Multan by Suhrawardi. Millions of people became his followers and as a result, Silsila Suhrawardiyya spread to every nook and corner of the country.

### **Suborders:**

Twarikh Aina-e-Tasawuf discusses the offshoots of Suhrawardiyya and Kubrawiya orders in a separate chapter. The author explains that similar to Kubrawiya, there are 9 offshoots of Suhrawardiyya order as well. However, he is providing information about 10 suborders from which 6 belongs to Suhrawardiyya and 4 belongs to Kubrawiya. These orders include Dariyya Karimiyya, Azeemiyya Karimiyya, Kubrawiyya Karimiyya, Quddusiyya Durvasiyya, Kubrawiyya Suhrawardiyya, Kubrawiyya Quddusiyya Durvasiyya, Ahmadiyya Karimiyya, Uluwiyya Duriyya Karimiyya, Hasniyya Asghariyya, and Siddiqiyya Hasniyya.<sup>17</sup>

### **Teachings:**

Similar to the other orders of Indian Subcontinent, Silsila Suhrawardiyya also focuses on dhikr. They prefer a silent form of dhikr. Similar to Naqshbandi Sufis, Suhrawardi masters also developed a curriculum for their muredeen. Moreover, promotion of the Khanaqahi culture is also one of the important features of this order. Although Khanaqah was introduced to Sufism since the 3<sup>rd</sup> century Hijri, it was only the efforts of Shahab al-Din Suhrawardi that Khanaqah emerged as an organized system in Sufism. Five complete chapters (13 to 18) of his Awarif ul-Maarif thoroughly deals with the principles of

Khanaqah.<sup>18</sup> His own Khanaqah was divided into various sections in which he used to share both introvertive and extrovertive knowledge with the followers. It is said that along with many other Sufi saints, famous Chishti Sufis such as Baba Farid and his predecessor Khawaja Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki (1173-1235) also acquired their spiritual training from the Khanaqah of Shahab al-Din Suharwardi. Though there are various similarities between Chishtis and Suharwardi Sufis, differences between both orders are also noted by the scholars. Shaikh Ikram writes that unlike Chishtis, "Suharwardi were more careful in following the rules of Sharia. They gave very little value to Sima'. They were not much tolerating to other religions. They were more involved in Dawah and more fond of traveling in compare to Chishtis."<sup>19</sup>

### **Silsila Chishtiyya:**

Historically, Chishtiyya order is considered as the oldest Sufi order of in comparison to Qadiri, Naqshbandi, and Suhrawardi salāsil. Abu Ishaq Shami (died 940) is regarded as the first master of Chishti Sufis. This order earned its name from a place Chisht where Shami was appointed by his Shaikh Mumshadh al-Dinawari (d. 299/911-12). Abu Muhammad is said to be the first Chishti Sufi to visit the Indian subcontinent. However, Moinuddin Ahmad Chishti (1142-1236) is regarded as the founder of Chishti order in the country. Although, he was mureed of Khawaja Usman Harooni, his habit of traveling allowed him to learn the treaties of Sufism from the hundreds of Sufi masters of his time including Abdul Qadir Gilani and Shahab al-Din Suharwardi. A large number of people converted to Islam at his hand. His strict adherence to Sharia, love for both Hindus and Muslim, and enormous success earned him the titles

of "The Messenger of Hind" and "The King of Hind". His successor, Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki, followed the path of his Shaikh. He was so famous among the people of Delhi that when once, on the order of Moinuddin Chishti, he was leaving the city, men and women gathered around wailing and requesting his Shaikh not to take him away from them. It was Kaki's brilliance that searched out Baba Farid who further strengthened the basis of Chishti order and trained Sufi masters such as Nizamuddin Auliya (1238-1325) and Alauddin Sabir Kaliyari (1196-1291).

### **Suborders:**

Chishti order of Sufis is mainly divided into two larger offshoots among them one is attributed towards Nizamuddin Auliya and other is towards Sabir Kaliyari. Twarikh Aina-e-Tasawuf provides information about 11 suborders of Silsila Nizamiyya that includes Quddusiyya Durvasiyya, Chishtiyya Azeemiyya, Quddusiyya Chishtiyya, Quddusiyya Chishtiyya Saeed, Quddusiyya Chishtiyya Ulul'azm Abdaliyya, Quddusiyya Jyuniyya Chishtiyya, Saluniyya Chishtiyya, Dariyya Chishtiyya, Safuriyya Munawariyya, Chishtiyya, Chishtiyya Fathiyya, and Chishtiyya Hasniyya.

### **Teachings:**

Among Chishtis, it is necessary for mureed to get a sound knowledge of Islamic sciences before Bait. Baba Farid himself first asked by Kaki to acquire extrovertive education before joining the order. Similar to other Sufi orders such as Suhrawardiyya and Qadiriyya, Chishtis focuses more on the louder form of dhikr. During their chants, they add special emphasis to the word "Allah".<sup>20</sup> Unlike Qadiri and Naqshabandi

Sufis, Sima' earned more fame in their circles that also played an essential role in the rapid spread of this silsila. Shaik Ikram argued that because of its practices such as Sima' and poetry, the environment of India proved more accommodating for Chishti Silsila. Moreover, similar to Suhrawardiyya, this order also finds it necessary to train their muredeen in their Khanaqahs. Chishtis are more open in their approach and therefore, not only welcome non-Muslims in their circles but also make them their muredeen.

Variations are evident in the method of teaching, training, and practice of these orders. However, fewer differences and more commonalities are observed among them. The basic teachings, for example, following the Holy Quran, Sunnah, and Shaikh along with practices and states such as Mujahida, Muraqaba (meditation), Jazb (unintentional love of God), and Sluk (quest for the closeness of God) are their common characteristics whereas when, how, with whom, and where different Sufi practices should be performed can be marked as general differences among the Sufi orders.

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- <sup>2</sup> William C. Chittick, *Sufism: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2008), P:27; Ihsaan Ilahi Zaheer, *Taṣwwuf Tarīkh wa Taḥqīq*, trans. Masuud Muhammad (Lahore: Idārah Tarjumān-ul-Sunnah, 2010),P: 10-11.

<sup>3</sup> Al-Qushayrī was a Muslim scholar, Sufi, historian, and mufassir. His *Al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya* is recognized as one of the early texts on Sufism.

<sup>4</sup> Al-Qushayrī, *Al-Risāla al-Qushayriyyah*, P: 42.

<sup>5</sup> Al-Tusi, *Kitāb al-luma' fi'l-Taṣawwuf*, P: 25.

<sup>6</sup> Al-Tusi, *Kitāb al-luma' fi'l-Taṣawwuf*, P: 40.

<sup>7</sup> Hujwiri, *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, P:130.

<sup>8</sup> Shammās Al-Rehman and Saeed Al-Rehman, "Junūbi Asia kī Muslim Tadhīb (712-1072) Aur Khānqāhi Nizām," *Al-Ayyām* 6, no. 2: 103.

<sup>9</sup> The first two stages were taifa (nation/tribe/group) and khanqah (monastery) respectively. For more details, see J. Spencer Triningham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), P: 103.

<sup>10</sup> Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi, *Tadhkiyya wa Iḥsān yā Taṣwwuf wa Sulūk* (Lakhnu: Majlis Tahqīqāt wa Nashriyāt-e-Islam, 1979), P:93.

<sup>11</sup> D. S. Margoliouth, "Qādiriyyah," in *Urdu Dārah Mu'arif Islamiyyah* (Lahore: Dānish Gah Punjab, 1978), P: 14.

<sup>12</sup> Muhammad Farooq Hasan, *Twārīkh-e-Āa'īnah Taṣwwuf* (Rampur: Hasnī Press, 1891), P: 59-113.

<sup>13</sup> Alaudeen, *Tadhkirah-e-Qādiriyyah*, P: 280.

<sup>14</sup> Arthur F. Buehler, "The Naqshbandiyya in Timurid India: The Central Asian Legacy " *Journal of Islamic Studies* 7, no. 2 (1996): P:228.

<sup>15</sup> Lillahi, *Tārīkh Mshā'ikh Naqshbandiyya*, P:27.

<sup>16</sup> 'Abdur Rehman Jāmī, *Nuḥāt al-Uns* (Lahore: Idārah Pēghām al-Quran, 2002), P: 496.

<sup>17</sup> Hasan, *Twārīkh-e-Āa'īnah Taṣwwuf*, P:181.

<sup>18</sup> Al-Suhrawardi, *'Awārif al-Mu'arif*, P:111.

<sup>19</sup> Shaikh Muhammad Ikram, *Āab-e-Kothar* (Lahore: Idārah Thqāfat-e-Islāmiyyah, 2006), P:254.

<sup>20</sup> Ikram, *Āab-e-Kothar*, P:253.