

SUFISM IN THE PUNJAB

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EDITORIAL NOTE

Although Sufism developed in Islamic countries and the Sufis were writing in Arabic and Persian languages, those Sufis, who migrated to the Panjab after the establishment of Islamic rule during the 11th century, adopted Panjabi language to spread their teachings of Sufism. The writings of early sufi, Shaikh Ali Al-Hujwari, were in Persian but the other Sufis, like Sheikh Farid started to write mostly in Panjabi about 250 years before Guru Nanak started to write in Panjabi. His work has also been incorporated in the Aad Guru Granth Sahib by Guru Arjan in 1604 CE. The writings of Farid clearly indicates that Panjabi was well established language before the 11th century or more correctly even before the early invasion of Islam during the 8th century. It is erroneously believed by many Sikhs and others that Panjabi was started by Guru Angad during the 16th century. Because of this erroneous belief MA Macauliffe (The Sikh Religion) raised doubts on the Bani of Farid that it could not be Panjabi – means somebody might have modified his language as it appears modern Panjabi. Many Sikhs are not sure about the origin of Punjabi and it is generally accepted that it originated from Sanskrit. Therefore, I am writing an article on the origin of Panjabi language which will be reported in one of the forthcoming issues of the Journal. Although official language of Muslim rulers in the Panjab was Persian, Dr Dhillon's article on Sufism clearly tells that Panjabi was the spoken language of the Panjab at the time of invasion by Muslims and it remained so during their rule and thereafter till today.

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INTRODUCTION

Sufism had its origin in Arabia but within a short time it developed as a great mystical movement in Islamic countries. A large number of Muslim saints and mystics enriched it with their mystical experiences and spiritual philosophy. When this movement reached Indian soil especially Punjab, it gathered more strength and a large number of people came into its fold. Multan, Lahore and some other places of Punjab were established as centers of Sufi learning.

Shaikh Ali Al-Hujwari (Data Ganj Bakhsh) of Ghazna (Afghanistan) came to Lahore in the year 1039 CE and died there in 1071 CE. He was a great Sufi scholar and author of a number of books. But none of his writings is available in Panjabi language. His book *Kasf Al-Mahjub* is considered to be the 1st book on Sufism in Persian language. He was of the opinion that no Sufi could achieve the highest spiritual state without participating in *Shariah*. According to him the real explanation of Islam was in Sufism.

During this period, a number of Sufi Silsilas started emerging in Islam. They played an important role in propagating the mystic aspect of Islamic teachings. Sufi Silsilas which gained prominence in Punjab were

Chishtiya, Suhra – Wardiya, Qadiriya and Naqshbandiya. Each Silsila was founded by an eminent spiritual personality of the time who commanded a great respect among the masses. These Silsilas laid stress on purification of inner self rather than following religious dogmas blindly. In fact these Silsila were training centers of spiritual learning and made the Sufi movement meaningful among the Muslims and non-Muslims.

Shaikh Farid-Ud-Din Ganj-I Shakar (1173-1265), the most popular saint of Chishtiya Silsila in the 12th and 13th century was pioneer of Sufi movement in the Punjab. His 112 *Stoks* and 4 *Sabds* were included in the Aad Guru Granth Sahib by Guru Arjan in 1604 CE. Khaliq Ahmad Nizami is of the view that Shaikh Farid's life of 93 years is one long illustration of the way in which the finite struggles to shatter all trammels of finitude and merges itself in the infinite and lives for the Lord alone.

Baba Farid inherited a rich religious, mystic and cultural tradition of Islam. He based his ideas on holy Qur'an and advocated a life of purity. Detachment, renunciation, and self-mortification play an important role in cleansing of the heart. He believed that the world was short lived and death was an end of man's

worldly journey. To overcome all the materialistic and spiritual hurdles Baba Farid advised his followers to pray to God five times a day. Prayer or remembrance of God is the only act through which one can establish one's spiritual contacts with the Almighty. It helps a man to wipe out pride, arrogance, anger, jealousy, and hatred from the heart. In other words moral qualities play a major role in cleansing man's spiritual world.

Shah Hussain (1538-1599 CE) was the second great Panjabi Sufi poet. He inherited a rich legacy of Panjabi Sufi poetry from Baba Farid. By the time Shah Husain started writing political, religious, and social atmosphere had changed. Sikh Gurus had been writing their spiritual experiences on the one hand and on the other Sufi saints had been exhibiting their love of God in their own way. Both were lovers of the Almighty God and enjoyed the nearness of each other. All of them were writing in Panjabi, the spoken language of the Panjab people. If the language of Panjab at that time were Sanskrit or Hindi then the Gurus and the Sufis would have used these languages rather than Panjabi.

Shah Husain's main contribution was in the form of 'Kafis'. Kafi is of Arabic origin. It is a poetic stanza of two lines and more lines are added to it when it is sung. Shah Husain was the first Panjabi Sufi poet who introduced this poetic form. His Kafis are the experiences of his spiritual yearning. With the grace and love of God he wanted to enjoy the nearness of his master. He believed in *Tauhid*. For him none was like Him (God) in this world and must pray to Him alone. Love of God was his highest object and he wanted his disciples to submit all their energies before Allah. *Murshid* plays an important role and illumines the inner self of man. This moral purification leads a Sufi to the house of Lord.

Shah Husain being a Malamati Sufi did not exhibit his spiritual enlightenment. He was considered anti religious for violating religious laws and rituals but inwardly he was the best servant of Allah. His writings had the power to transform the worldly personality of a person into a 'perfect man' – the end of man's spiritual journey.

Sultan Bahu (1631-1691 CE) was a scholar of Arabic and Persian but he contributed to Panjabi Sufi poetry also in the form of 'Siharfi'. He advocated those Sufi thoughts which had already been given prominence in Sufi poetry. He laid specific stress on 'Love of God' – considered to be the wine of life of a Sufi. Fellowship of the *murid* was very important for this attainment. For Sultan Bahu *murid* helped his disciple

on his long, hard and strenuous journey to the House of God. He had the capacity to illumine the personality of his *murid* with Godly qualities because a *murshid* was considered to be with Allah. In fact he belonged to philosophical school of Sufis.

Shah Sharif Batalvi (1640-1724 CE) do figure in the context of Panjabi Sufi poetry. His writings were *Shutarnama*, *Dohre*, and *Kafian*. His mystic experience reflects in his *Dohre* and *Kafian*.

Bulleh Shah (1680-1758) was considered to be a great sufi poet of 17th and 18th century. Though his contribution was in different poetic forms – *Kafian* *Bara Maha*, *Athwara*, *Dohre*, *Siharfian*, *Gandhan*, etc. but his *Kafis* are more popular. In *Kafis* his mystic experience goes beyond materialistic barriers. He knew that religious preachers of Islam were ignorant of real meanings of religious ethics and morality. Outwardly they were exhibiting themselves to be very religious but inwardly they were leading an anti religious and anti spiritual lives. He was a great critic of such religious persons. Love of God was everything for him and he wanted to enjoy that for ever. With him Panjabi Sufi poetry touched great spiritual and mystic heights.

Ali Hayder (1690-1758 CE) made his contributions in the form of *Siharfi*, *Kafian*, and *Guftgu*. Love of God is the central theme of his writings and to be with God his ultimate aim. In his poetry Sufism gets philosophical explanation.

Hashim Shah (1735-1843 CE) was a Panjabi love-story writer but he is also considered to be a great Sufi poet on the basis of 'Dohre' named 'Daryae Haqiqat'. Love of God is the central theme of his writings. According to him when there is separation between the lover and the beloved, the soul faces an unbearable spiritual pain and agony. To overcome this painful situation, one must submit one's everything before the Almighty God.

The last major Sufi poet of Panjabi language was **Ghulam Farid Chachra (1845-1901 CE)**. His 271 *Kafis* are in fact full of God's love. Separation from God – the basic and central theme of Sufism has been described in most effective language. It can be said that Panjabi Sufi poetry touches its ultimate climax in his *Kafis*. After him no great Sufi poet emerged on the scene of this great mystic movement and it lost its glory within a short period.

There were some minor Sufi poets such as *Gulam Jilani* *Rohtaki*, *Karam Ali*, *Karim Bakhsh*, *Bahdar*,

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Shah Murad, Ghulam Mustafa, Gulam Husain Kelianwala, Mohammad Din, Mohammed Ashraf but their contributions are negligible.

Some modern Panjabi poets were also influenced by Sufi thought. Dhani Ram Chatrik, Dr Mohan Singh, Pritam Singh Safir expressed their Sufi thoughts but to a limited extent.

It can be said that the history of about seven hundred years of Panjabi Sufi poetry is full of mystic themes and spiritual contents. Though Sufi poets adopted different poetic forms but 'Kafi' was the most popular and accepted form in which almost every Sufi poet expressed his inner self. Kafi was considered a 'love song', which over flows with music and rhythm and makes the spiritual marriage of the soul with the Almighty easy.