

Sufism and Mysticism in Aurangzeb Alamgir's Era

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Abstract

Mysticism is defined as a search of God, Spiritual truth and ultimate reality. It is a practice of religious ideologies, myths, ethics and ecstasies. The Christian mysticism is the practise or theory which is within Christianity. The Jewish mysticism is theosophical, meditative and practical. A school of practice that emphasizes the search for Allah is defined as Islamic mysticism. It is believed that the earliest figure of Sufism is Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Different Sufis and their writings have played an important role in guidance and counselling of people and peaceful co-existence in the society. Mughal era was an important period regarding Sufism in the subcontinent. The Mughal kings were devotees of different Sufi orders and promoted Sufism and Sufi literature. It is said that Aurangzeb Alamgir was against Sufism, but a lot of Mystic prose and poetic work can be seen during Aurangzeb Alamgir's era. In this article, we will discuss Mystic Poetry and Prose of Aurangzeb's period.

Key Words:

Sufism, Mystic poetry,
Mughal dynasty,
Aurangzeb Alamgir,
Habib Ullah Hashmi.

Introduction

Mysticism or Sufism can be defined as search of God, spiritual truth and ultimate reality. It is a practice of religious ideologies, myths, ethics and ecstasies. The word mysticism was originated from Ancient Greek word which means 'to conceal'. The modern definition of mysticism is uniting with The God. It is found in the traditions of all the religions. 'For mystics the spiritual is not something merely to think about but also something to be encountered. Spiritual phenomenon may be said to be experienced when they are thought about in such a way that a depth of feeling becomes attached to them. When experience of the spiritual is heartfelt, the spiritual is found to be mysterious, awesome, urgent and fascinating.' (Hussain 1991/6)

Mystics experience a spiritual phenomenon that is not visible, and those emotions are hidden from the senses. According to the mystics, their experiences cannot be described. Language can refer to experiences, as a kind of notational shorthand that enables other people who have had similar experiences to understand approximately what is meant, but it can never convey the whole content of an experience. Some mystics prefer to retreat in silence, and some mystics hide their experiences, but they openly share their ideas and beliefs. They express their hidden experiences through writing coded languages. (Mercur 2000/25)

The language of mysticism is normally symbolic and a bit difficult. "There are two general tendencies in the speculation of mystics-to regard God as outside the soul, which rises to its God by successive stages, or to regard God as dwelling within the soul and to be found by delving deeper into one's own reality. The idea of transcendence, as held most firmly by mystics, is the kernel of the ancient mystical system, Neoplatonism, and of Gnosticism. Their explanation of the connection between God and humans by emanation is epoch-making in the philosophy of contemplation. Among those who think of God, or the supreme reality, as being within the soul are the Quakers." (Noor Baksh 1957/23)

The Christian mysticism is the practise or theory, which is within Christianity. In Greek, the derivative of mysticism is mystikos, which means an initiate. It has three dimensions; biblical, liturgical and spiritual. These dimensions refer to hidden truth, presence of Christ and knowledge of God. (Emin 2008/35)

The Jewish mysticism has two kinds of mysticism: Merkabah mysticism and Kabbalah. The three general streams of Kabbalah are theosophical, meditative and practical. "Jewish mysticism has exerted influence outside the Jewish community. Kabbalah, distorted and deflected from its own intentions, has helped to nourish and stimulate certain currents of thought in Christian society since the renaissance. Jewish myth and legend comprise a vast body of stories transmitted over the past 3000

years in Hebrew and in the vernacular dialects spoken by Jews, such as Yiddish and Ladino. These stories have played an important role in the history of Jewish religion and culture.” (Mehmood 1983/ 54)

Sufism is also known as mysticism, Tassawwuf in Arabic and Irfan in Persian, a school of practice that emphasizes the search for Allah. It is also defined as Islamic mysticism. “An abstract word, Sufism derives from the Arabic term for a mystic, Sufi, which is in turn derived from suf, wool, plausibly a reference to the woolen garment of early Islamic ascetics. The Sufis are also generally known as, the poor, fuqara, plural of the Arabic faqir, in Persian dervish, whence the English words fakir and dervish.” (Sajjadi 1953/4)

It is believed that the earliest figure of Sufism is Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and Sufis regard Him PBUH as ‘Al-Insan Al-Kamil’, which means that Prophet Muhammed PBUH defines the morality of Allah. Sufis also regard Prophet PBUH as their spiritual guide and believe that by pledging allegiance to their Shaykh means pledging allegiance to Muhammed PBUH. Sufi understands and connects with Allah through Muhammed PBUH. (Hussain 1991/34)

“Islam made its appearance on the world stage more than fourteen hundred years ago and immediately came into contact with the Persian and Byzantine worlds. As the Islamic world expanded it had to come to terms not just with the rationalism of the Greeks but with the belief systems of the Persians, the Hindus, the Buddhists and the Chinese. The Muslims learned, absorbed, amalgamated the ideas of the east and the west and gave to the world the empirical-scientific method, algebra, chemistry, arabesque, Tasawwuf and the Taj Mahal.” (Nazeer Ahmad 2001/2)

Sufism is an important part of Islam and it is an important and worldwide aspect of Muslim life in Islamic world. The growth and spread of Sufism is an ultimate factor of growth of Islam, especially in regions of India, Senegal, Africa, Libya, Sudan etc. Mystic poets such as Rumi, played a vital role in spreading Islamic culture and values in central Asia, South Asia and Anatolia. Imam Ali a.s have directly pledged allegiance with Prophet PBUH, and Sufis consider Him a.s the main figure for the connection between them, Allah and Muhammed PBUH. Great Sufis such as Ali Hajweri and Junaid Baghdadi have referred Imam Ali, a.s as having a high rank in mysticism. (Mehmood 1983/ 16)

A Sufi should be faithful to His religion and his aqeedah should be accurate. He should stay away from the sins, love of world, wealth. Sufi practices include Zikr, Muraqba, Sufi whirling, qawwali and samaa. Zikr means remembering Allah, Muraqba is known as meditation, Sufi whirling is the other form of Samaa and this practice is originated by the devishes of Rumi’s order. Qawwali is a Sufi devotional melody and Ameer Khusroo introduced Persian, Arabic, Turkish and Indian classical melodies. Qawwalis can be classified as Hamd, Naat, Manqabat or Marsiya. (Emin 2008/22)

Some famous Sufis of the Subcontinent are Hasan Basri, Zul-Noon Misri, Haris Muhasbi, Maroof Karkhi, Sari Saqti, Ibrahim ibn Adham, Al-Qusheyri, Shah Wali-Ullah, Abdul Qadir Jilani, Bu Ali Qalandar, Sultan Bahu, Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki, and Shah Abdul Lateef Bhittai. The most famous Sufi shrines in Pakistan are: Shrine of Data Ganj Baksh in Lahore, Shrine of Abdullah Shah Ghazi in Karachi, Shrine of Hazrat La’al Shehbaz Qalandar in Sehwan Shraeef, Shrine of Sachal Sarmast in Khairpur and Shrine of Hazrat Bahauddin Zakariya in Multan.

“The Islamic penetration of the subcontinent accelerated in the 13th century. Several reasons may be cited for this change. First, the establishment of the Delhi sultanate enabled Muslim scholars and traders to travel freely throughout India under the protection of the political authorities. Second, India was a beneficiary of the Mongol invasions (1219-1261) that devastated Central Asia and Persia. Many noted scholars fled the Mongols into the security of Hindustan. Third and perhaps the most important element, was the establishment of Sufi orders throughout the vast subcontinent. Indeed, Islam spread in India and Pakistan not by the force of conquest or the elaborate arguments of *mullahs* and *kadis* but through the work of the great Sufi shaykhs. In this respect, Muslim India is different from the Arab countries where Islam was introduced during the classical period (665-1258) through the work of the *muhaddithin* and the *mujahideen*.” (Nazeer Ahmad 2001/3)

Tariqat is the other word for Sufi order. It is a concept of spiritual teachings which aims to seek the ultimate truth. Qadriya, Chishtiya, Naqshbandiya and Soharwardiya are the four most popular Tariqas of South Asia. The Qadriya order was named after Sheykh Abdul Qadir Jilani, the Naqshbandiya order was named after Baha-ud-din Naqshband Bukhari, the Soharwardiya order was named after Shahab-ud-din Soharwardi, and the Chishtiya order was named after Khawaja Modood Chishti. Other famous Sufi orders are Bektashi, Mevlevi, Shadhili, Qalandari, Awaisi, Shattari, Tijaniya, Ashrafiya, Malamatiya, and Kubrawiya. (Chishti 2006/43)

“The Sufi shaykhs of the 13th century were not missionaries. They were not merchants of faith, peddling their religion. They were men drunk with the love of God, giving of themselves for no gain but the prospect of divine pleasure, serving humanity irrespective of creed or nationality and sharing their spiritual bounty with whoever would partake of it. Proselytizing was not their goal; it was a byproduct of their selfless service. The Sufi way strove to mend human behavior and to open up human vistas to the sublime peace that comes from proximity to God. Their “miracles” were the transformations of human hearts. The Muslims needed this spirituality as much as did the

Hindus and the Buddhists. When a Muslim experienced a spiritual rebirth through a Sufi, it was called an awakening. When a non-Muslim was similarly transformed, it was called a conversion.” (Nazeer Ahmad 2001/4)

Some prominent Sufis and Sufi literature are as follows:

Al-Ghazali

Al-Ghazali was born in Toos, Iran. He got his education from Jorjan and Nishapur and was appointed as a professor in a college in Baghdad. Later, he abandoned his career and adopted the life of a Sufi. “Ghazali’s greatest work is *Ahya-al-Uloom-al-Din*. In 40 books he explained the doctrines and practices of Islam and showed how these could be made the basis of a profound devotional life, leading to the higher stages of Sufism, or mysticism.” (Badakhshani 211)

Ibn al Arabi

Ibn Arabi was born in Spain. He stayed in Sevilla for 30 years and studied there with a number of mystical masters. After that, he travelled towards Mecca, North Africa, Egypt, Baghdad, Anatolia, and Aleppo in search of masters of the Sufi path. His major works are *Al-Fatuhah Al-Makkiyah* and *Fusus-al-Hikam*. He wrote *Al-Fatuhah Al-Makkiyah* in 560 chapters. “It is a work of tremendous size, a personal encyclopedia extending over all the esoteric sciences in Islam as Ibn Arabi understood and had experienced them, together with valuable information about his own inner life.” (Hussain 1991/154) His other book *Fusus-al-Hikam* consists of 27 chapters, and it comprises of Ibn Arabi’s mystical thoughts.

Jalal-ud-Din Rumi

Maulana Rumi was the famous Sufi poet of the 13th century. He is known amongst the most famous poets. His poems have been translated into many other languages. His most famous work is *Masnavi Ma’navi*. It is called the Quran in Persian. “Rumi lived for a short while after completing the *Masnavi*. His other famous poetic work is *Diwan-e-Shams Tabriz*. He always remained a respected member of Konya society, and his company was sought by the leading officials as well as by Christian monks. Besides his poetry, Rumi left a small collection of occasional talks as they were noted down by his friends; in the collection, known as *Fih-ma-Fih*, the main ideas of his poetry recur. There also exist sermons and a collection of letters called *Maktoobat* directed to different persons.” (Jamil Ahmad 1984/230)

Ali Hujwiri:

Hazrat Ali Hujwiri, also known as *Data Ganj Baksh*, migrated from Ghazni to Lahore. His shrine, also known as *Data Darbar*, is one of the most visited shrines. A public holiday is observed on the death anniversary of Hazrat Ali Hujwiri. Ali Hujwiri’s most famous work is *Kashf-ul-Mahjoob* which means the unveiling of the hidden. *Kashf-ul-Mahjoob* comprises of different aspects of Sufism and introduction to many Sufi saints. The contents of the book include Sufism, poverty, faith, Gnosis of God, blame, fasting, pilgrimage etc. (Dr Riaz, Dr Shibli 2011/149)

Moeen-Ud-Din Chishti:

Moeen-Ud-Din Chishti was also known as *Khawaja Ghareeb Nawaz*. He settled in the Indian subcontinent in the 13th century. He was a Persian Muslim, mystic, scholar and a preacher. He is one of the most famous Chishti Sufis. He was also given the titles of *Khawaja-e-Ajmer* and *Sultan-ul-Hind*. His famous books are *Anees-ul-Arwah*, *Hadees-ul-Mu’aarif*, *Risala Mojoodiyya*, *Kanj-ul-Asrar*, *Kashf-ul-Asrar* and *Afaq-o-Anfas*. (Shams ud Din 2012/260)

Attar Nishapuri:

Fareed-ud-Din Attar is a well-known Persian Sufi poet, writer and thinker. He wrote many poems and prose work as well. He travelled through Egypt, Syria, Arabia, India and central Asia and met many Sufis and collected the sayings of Sufis. His most famous work is *Mantaq-al-Tayr* which means conference of birds in which he explained valley of the quest, valley of love, valley of knowledge, valley of detachment, the valley of unity, the valley of wonderment and valley of poverty. Other famous poems of Attar are *musibat nama* and *Illahi nama*. *Tazkira-tul-Auliya* is his most famous prose work which has biographies of many Sufi Saints. (Alvi 1998/34)

Nizam-ud-Din Auliya:

He was also known as *Mehboob-e-Ilahi*. Nizam-ud-Din Auliya was one of the most famous Sufi saints of the Indian

subcontinent from Chishti order. Also, he was the founder of the Chishti Nizami order, which further has branches known as Naseeria, Hussainia, Fakhri, Ashrafiya, Faridiya and Niyazi. Ameer khusro collected the sayings of Hazrat Nizam-ud-Din Auliya and wrote a book named Fawaid-ul-Fawad. (Tareen 2016/35-36)

Rabia Basri:

Rabia Basri was a famous female Sufi Saint. Farid-ud-Din Attar has mentioned about her life in his book Tazkira-tul-Auliya. She is also known as the Queen of Saintly Women. She has no written work left, but Turkish cinema has filmed a few movies on the role of Rabia Basri. (Alvi 1998/44)

Mian mir:

Hazrat Mian Mir was a famous Sufi Saint belonging to Qadriya order. He is known as 'Saint of Kings'. Mughal kings such as Jehangir, Shah Jahan, Aurangzeb Alamgir and prince Dara shikoh had spiritual connections with him. Dara Shikoh has written Mian mir's biography in two of his famous books Safeena-tul-Auliya and Sakina-tul-Auliya and also mentioned his few sayings in it. On the request of Guru Arjan Dev, Hazrat Mian mir laid the foundation of the Golden temple. (Dara Shikoh 1986/112)

"The Sufis were eminently successful not just because they recited the *dhikr*, chanted devotional songs and practised charity, but because they established effective institutions to do their work in their own lifetime and to continue it after they departed. At the center of the Sufi approach is the belief that only a learned and pious teacher can impart true knowledge to a discipline. The structure of a Sufic order is pyramidal. At the apex of the pyramid is the *Qutub* (the pole) or the *Wali* (master, protector), *Khalifa* (representative) or *Sajjadah Nishin* (one who resides in the sanctuary). For instance, the *Qutub* of the Qadariya School is Shaykh Abdul Qader Jeelani of Baghdad." (Nazeer Ahmad 2001/6)

"The Sufis were well-read, widely travelled, and spiritual leaders of the masses. They succeeded in their mission because they had both the strength of character and the courage of conviction and were selfless and devoted to their cause. Their movement made inroads in the Subcontinent, and it grew powerful and successful for a number of reasons. Firstly, before they started preaching, they set a noble and brilliant example through their behaviour and conduct. Secondly, Islam was preached by them in a simple, pragmatic and flexible way, contrary to the ulemas who laid much emphasis on the rigidity of rules. Thirdly, they highlighted Allah's positive and merciful attributes to ignite a love of God in people's hearts. The Sufis disliked formalities and ceremonial acts, preferring to lead simple lives, and their lofty and admirable principles became guidelines for the people. They were against suppressions and social evils, condemning the use of force to gain power. Then their Khanqahs were always open for everyone, and those with money had to donate generously to the needy. People flocked from time to time to the Sufis for solace and comfort." (Masood Bhutto 2006/7)

When Sultan Mehmood Ghaznavi invaded India, many poets and Sufis came towards the Indian subcontinent. (Badakhshani, 123). Ali Hujwiri was the most prominent Sufi of the Ghaznavid era. After Ghaznavids came Ghurrids. There were famous Sufi poets from Ghurri era, namely Shahab-ud-Din Badauni and Sheykh Jamal-ud-Din Hanswi. Hanswi was the descendent of famous Sufi Fareed-ud-Din Ganj Shakar. (Chishti 2006/187). After Ghurrids, Tughlaqs and Khiljis took over India. Ameer Khusro and Abu Ali Qalandar are the most prominent Sufi poets of this era. Ameer Khusro wrote five Mathnavis. Also, he wrote five Mathnavis in famous Khamsa-e-Nizami's answer. Sayyeds and Lodhis captured India after Tughlaqs and Khiljis. The most famous mystic books of this period are Seyr-ul-Arifeen and Manaqib-e-Ghosia. Seyr-ul-Arifeen is the work of Jamali, famous mystic of this era. (Zahoor ud Din 1974/56)

Zaheer-Ud-Din Babar was the founder of Mughal dynasty. He came into power after defeating Sultan Ibrahim Lodi. Babar himself was a mystic poet. He wrote poems both in Turkish and Persian languages. After the battle of Panipat Babar first visited the shrines of Sheykh Nizam-ud-Din Auliya and Khawaja Moin-ud-Din Chishti Ajmeri. (Hasan, 1985/7). One of the most prominent Sufis of Humayun's era was Madhu Lal Hussain, who was a Punjabi Sufi poet and his folktales of Heer Ranjha are very famous. Akbar was a follower of Chishti order, and he was a devotee of Khawaja Moeen-ud-Din Chishti Ajmeri. He used to visit his Shrine often. Khawaja Baqi Billah was the famous Sufi of Akbar's reign. Akbar named his son Jehangir after Sheykh Salim Chishti. Sheykh Ahmad sirhindi was the most famous Mystic of Jehangir's era. He was also known as Mujaddid Alif Sani. His famous work is Maktoobat-e-Imam Rabhani, which translated into Turkish, Persian and Urdu languages. (Ahmad 1984/292). Shah Jahan was the fifth Mughal emperor. His daughter Jahan'ara begum herself was a mystic writer. She followed Mullah Shah Badakhshi of Qadriya order. Jahan'ara wrote a biography of Moeen-ud-Din Chishti titled as Munis-al-Arwah and biography of Mullah Shah Badakhshi titled as Risalah-e-Sahibiya. Shah Jahan's son, Dara Shikoh was

also a mystic writer who wrote biographies of Sufi Saints in his Book Safina-tul-Auliya, and he wrote the biography of Hazrat Mian Mir in his book Sakina-tul-Auliya. (Rizvi 1983/481)

“Aurangzeb Alamgir was the sixth ruler of Mughal dynasty. He ruled for nearly 50 years, from 1658 until 1707, the last great imperial power in India before British colonialism. According to many, he destroyed India politically, socially and culturally. (Chishti 2006/103). Many modern Indians see Aurangzeb as a brutal oppressor of Hindus. He was a pious Muslim, and it is widely believed that he spent his long reign, nearly half a century, rampaging against Hindus and Hinduism. People claim that Aurangzeb systematically destroyed Hindu cultural institutions, levelling thousands of Hindu temples. Some have even said that the reason why north India lacks the temples that one finds in south India is that Aurangzeb smashed them all to pieces.” (Nomani 2016/98)

“Aurangzeb actively fought against invented practices in Islam (bidah) and myths. He fought against Sufism, sometimes to extremes, for example, killing Sarmad Kashani, a naked “majzoob” (holy man). He prevented Sufism to such an extent that prominent Sufi Bulleh Shah one day danced and played music in the streets of Lahore in protest of their practices being shut down.” (Ansari 1969/27)

On the other hand, a lot of Sufi literature is found in Aurangzeb’s era. Some of the famous Mathnavis of his era are Ramaiyan of Beydil, Lam’aat-ul-Tahireen of Ghulam Ali Dakkani and Wajib-ul-Hifz of A’qil. Other mystic work of his reign is Uroos-e-Irfan, Kanz-ul-Hidayat and Irshad-e-Rahimiya. Sultan Bahoo, Bulleh Shah, Mirza Beydil and Nasir Ali Sirhindi were the leading mystic poets of Aurangzeb period. (Zahoor ud din 2002/58)

During Aurangzeb era, there were a few writers who wrote explanation/review of a few mystic books. Among them, Habib Ullah Hashmi was the one who wrote an explanation, also known as Sharh in Urdu and Persian, on Nizami Ganjvi’s Mathnavi Makhzan-ul-Asraar. He wrote this review in 12th year of Aurangzeb’s reign in 1670. In the beginning, Habib Ullah has praised Aurangzeb in a short poem. In this explanation, named as Miftah-ul-Makhzan, the writer has added couplets of Rumi, Sa’adi and Khaqani. He has also added a story from Firdosi’s Shahnameh, who is Iran’s national poet. He has also taken help from Quran and hadiths. (Zahoor ud Din 1974/545)

Other few explanations/reviews from Aurangzeb’s era are Sharh-e-Boostan of Mir Noor-Ullah Ehrari, Sharh-e- Mathnavi-e-Rumi of Mohammed Raza Lahori and Sharh-e-Qasa’id-e-Urfi of Mirza Jan. (Ansari 1979/537)

“In the Arabic parts of the Islamic world, only a few interesting mystical authors are found after 1500. They include al-Sha’rānī in Egypt (died 1565) and the prolific writer ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī in Syria (died 1731). Turkey produced some fine mystical poets in the 17th and 18th centuries. The influence of the mystical orders did not recede; rather, new orders came into existence, and most literature was still tinged with mystical ideas and expressions. Political and social reformers in the Islamic countries have often objected to Sufism because they have generally considered it to be backward, hampering the free development of society. Thus, the orders and dervish lodges in Turkey were closed by Kemal Mustafa Atatürk in 1925. Yet, their political influence is still palpable, though under the surface. Such modern Islamic thinkers as the Indian philosopher Muḥammad Iqbāl have attacked traditional monist mysticism and have gone back to the classical ideals of divine love as expressed by Ḥallāj and his contemporaries. The activities of modern Muslim mystics in the cities are mostly restricted to spiritual education.” (Schimmel 1998/23)

Sufism is an important aspect of Islam, but now it is popular worldwide, and every religion has separate mystical practices. It is not only limited to Islam, but it is believed to be the path to get close to God in every religion, also known as ‘Wasl’. Although Aurangzeb was not close to Sufism, there were many Sufis and Sufi literature during his reign.

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