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Sufism: Spiritual and Cultural Traditions in India

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Abstract

The relevance of the topic is determined by the necessity of further research of cultural and spiritual traditions in India, for the study of the history of Islam spread and establishment, and for development of the Sufi doctrine formation theory. Taking into account the local history aspect of the topic, we note that now we are seeing a gradual restoration of Sufism in Tatarstan. It is a reference to the past of Sufism in the region, an appeal to the religious heritage of the Tatar people. The leading approach to the study of this topic is the theoretical and conceptual, historical and scholarly understanding of continuity in the sequential study of this topic.

This article aims to achieve the following aims: the analysis and evaluation of Sufism as a constituent of Indian culture, aimed at ensuring the implementation of modern ethical and aesthetic concepts of Sunni Islam, their transformation in the mass consciousness of the Muslim peoples of India. The main results of this study are the identification and development of the accumulated material on the stated topic, and further development of its theoretical and practical bases. Referring to centuries of experience and traditions of Islam, it is important to turn to the study of the history and philosophy of Sufism in the Indian subcontinent.

Keywords: Islamic sects, Sufism, Spiritual and cultural traditions of India, Sufism on the Indian subcontinent.

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Introduction

Whatever the etymological roots of Sufism may be, it is certain that Sufis, who had a profound impact on the social structures of Asia, is a well-organized group within the context of Muslim culture (Safiullina al-Annecy, 2016).

Ethical and aesthetic concepts of Sufism have been transformed in the minds of some Eurasian peoples, and found their expression in the worldview of the Muslim peoples of Russia (Iordan, 2001).

The introduction of Sufism among the ancestors of modern Tatars occurred in Volga Bulgaria era. In the Golden Horde, the process of Islamization occurred along with the spread of Sufism, and then it continued after the collapse of the Horde in the territory of the newly formed Tatar khanates, including Kazan. A prominent Muslim figure Kul Sharif, who participated in the defense of Kazan during its capture by the troops of Ivan the Terrible, was a follower of a Sufi order (Suleymanov, 2016).

The spread of Islam in the Indian subcontinent did not take place by force of arms, but through its peaceful preaching, in which the Sufis played a leading role. Sufism came to India with the first sultans, under whom it reached its highest peak. (Mrathuzina, & Nasrutdinova 2015) With Sufism ideas of Islam took root among the poorest of Indians, who never had a chance to read the Koran because of their illiteracy. The Great Moguls, up to Aurangzeb, honored Sufi teachers and implemented policies of orthodox Islam (Khayrutdinov, et al, 2017).

Methods

In the last decades, historical, academic and historiographical studies have demonstrated the expansion and deepening of the problems of the spread and assimilation of Islam by different peoples of Asia, and extensive literature allows recreating the picture of the development of knowledge about the religious history and culture of the peoples of India.

The systematic approach developed in academic research allows avoiding one-sidedness and schematism in the interpretation of problems. It expands the systematic understanding of the factors, conditions and essence of the formation and development, differentiation and integration of academic knowledge about the status of Islam in India.

The comparative-historical method of comparison and parallels are important. This method allows us to highlight the formation of Muslim culture in close connection with the social and political situation of an era.

The method of periodization allows us to identify the periods and stages that qualitatively distinguish the formation of Islamic ideology in India. It also allows us to create a dynamic image of the progressing or regressing role of Islam in the culture of the peoples of India.

Synchronous method involves the study of various events and phenomena at the same time, the use of this method makes it possible to identify common and specific features. The combination of the

synchronous method with the chronological method allows considering the phenomena in the interconnections and the consequent changes in the practice of Islam in India.

The method of actualization allows us to make academic forecasts of the presence of Muslim culture in India on the basis of identifying its leading trends. The perspective technique allows us to identify promising educational and academic fields of study of the history of Islam in India.

Thus, theoretical and methodological research methods provide an opportunity to dialectically study and deepen the scholarly basis of the history of Islam in India, which traces the general social and academic values of the influence of ideology and practice of the state, socio-cultural factors, the system of universal and academic ethical norms.

Results and Discussion

After the fall of the Abbasid dynasty in 1258 and the capture of Baghdad – the largest cultural and intellectual center of the time – by the Mongols, many thought that Islam is on the verge of death. Islam in India not only survived the hardships of the Mongol invasion but also successfully coped with it, thanks to the efforts of the Sufis, who preserved the spiritual dimension of Islam and were able to convince its opponents to accept its teachings. The founder of the Mughal dynasty Babur was an Islamized and Turkized descendant of the once formidable "conquerors of the Universe". He admired Sufi poetry and, while in Persia, often visited the mausoleums of Sufi sheikhs (Mukhamedzhanov I.)

There are many mausoleums of Sufi sheikhs in India; among them are the Dargah (abode) of Moinuddin Chishti in Ajmer, Dargah of Hazrat Nasiruddin Mahmud in Delhi, also known as the Dargah of Chirag-I-Delhi Dargah of Khawaja Banda Nawaz in Gulbarga city, Dargah of Kutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki or Dargah Qutb-Sahib in Mehrauli, the mausoleum of Salim Chishti in Fatehpur Sikri (Kruglova E.)

It is believed that Sufism has Indian influences (in addition to Christian and Chinese). In particular, parallels with the ideas of Sufis can be found in different religions; they are present in teachings of saints Teresa of Avila and John Cross, Guru Nanak or in such sacred books as the Vedas, Adi Granth and Bhagavatgita.

By the 12th century Sufism acquired traits of socially formed institute, and its main tariqahs (Chishtia, Suhrawardiyya, Qadiriyyah, Naqshbandiyya) appeared. Numerous students of the Sufi sheikhs began to arrive to the Indian subcontinent to preach Islam to the local people. Among them, the most were adherents of the Chashtia tariqah which was founded in Afghanistan in the mid-12th century. The founder of tariqa Sheikh Muiniddin Chishti preached among the population of Punjab, Lahore and Ajmer. Method of Suhrawardiyya tariqah (based in Iraq in the late 12th century), was propagated in India by Bahauddin Zakaria and Surhposh Jalaluddin Bukhari. They were most active in the cities of Multan and Ush. Contrary to widespread but erroneous belief, the authorities of Muslim countries at that time actively supported and helped Sufis. The Delhi Sultan Shamsuddin Iltutmish even appointed Zakaria Bahauddin the title of Shaykh al-Islam. The most famous Sufis of India, Muiniddin, Fariduddin,

Qutbuddin and Nizamuddin, came from Afghanistan. They came to the country with the conquerors, thanks to their efforts, the conversion of the local population to Islam was largely peaceful. Nizamuddin Auliya preached Islam in Delhi, from where it spread to the South of India along with the power of the Tuglak dynasty (G. Sharkieva)

Sufism in India to some extent owes its appearance to the teachings of the Sikhs – the founder of Sikhism Guru Nanak tried to bring together Islam and Hinduism and became a preacher of a new faith in the One God, the Almighty and all-pervading Creator, whose real name is not known to anyone. At the same time, Sufis always opposed the mixing of religions or religious syncretism. So the famous Naqshbandi sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi (Imam Rabbani) criticized the Mughal Sultan Akbar I, because he tried to bring together Islam and Hinduism. As a strict follower of the Hanafi mazhab, he demanded total observance of all Sharia regulations and absolute adherence to the Sunnah of the prophet Muhammad. He criticized the ideas of Ibn Arabi and the concept of "unity of being" (Wahdat al-wujud). In contrast to this idea, Sirhindi developed the concept of "unity of testimony" (Wahdat ash-shuhud), which spread widely throughout the Muslim world. Ahmad Sirhindi strongly opposed the various heresies that were prevalent at his time and fought for the observance of Sharia law (Kolesnikov, A. 2010).

"Ain-I-Akbari" (institutes of Emperor Akbar) listed 14 famous Sufis of the time, and six of them attracted both Hindus and Muslims. The most prominent of them is Sheikh Moinuddin Chisti. He came to India from the Persian city of Chist during the reign of Prithviraj Chauhan and settled in Ajmer, the great religious center of the Hindus. The Sufi-Chist, who called the Hindus their brothers, led a life of austerity. When Sheikh Moinuddin Chisti was asked what was the manifestation of high devotion to God, he answered: "Deliverance from suffering, feeding the hungry, and meeting the immediate needs of the afflicted." Among his instructions to his followers was: "To develop the river of generosity, the sun of love and the land of hospitality." This Sheikh was also called "Gharib nawaz" ("Defender of the poor"), "Sultan-un-hind" and "Nayb-I-Rasulullah-Fial-hind" ("Agent of the prophet in India").

Another prominent Sufi-Chisti was Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya (1236-1325), known as "Mehbub-I-Ilahi" ("Beloved of God"), who settled in Delhi and taught there students for over fifty years. Farid-ud-Din Masood Ganj-e-Shakar of Pak-Pattan (Pakistan, 1175-1265), also known as Baba Farid, was a great Saint, Sufi, and poet who wrote in Punjabi. His tomb is equally visited by both Hindus and Muslims. He said that "Life is the bride for whom the groom comes, and he is death." He asked: "Why do you wander in the woods, oh Farid, injuring your feet on thorns and thistles? Seek omnipotence not in the forests and deserts, but within yourself." The fact that the verses of Baba Farid "Doha" are included in the Holy book of Sikhs "Adi Granth", the texts of which are read all times in the Golden temple of Amritsar, shows how close was his poetry to everyone (Khullar K.K10).

Another Sufi order in medieval India was Sohrevardi – their center was located in Ganpule, and its branches were in Mandu and Gwalior (Madhya Pradesh). They preached "chhatra" – a synthesis of Hindu and Muslim mysticism, and even created a parallel terminology. The Sufi school also flourished in Uttar Pradesh during the reign of Emperor Akbar. The traditions of the Central Asian tariqah of

Naqshbandi ("artists") continued, its representatives in the 17-18 centuries were Hajji Baki-bi-Ulah from Delhi and Mirza Mahzar Jan-I-Jahan.

The 18th century was marked by the life of the great Sufi Shah Waliullah, who translated the Holy Quran into Persian. A little later, his two sons translated the Koran into Urdu. The voice of Shah Waliullah was the voice of consensus and reconciliation. He insisted on the need to codify laws on social, religious and legal practices of people in different regions of India. He stood for a new social and economic order based on the humanism of the arts and the rationalism of the sciences. The thoughts of this wise and astute Sufi were far ahead of his time.

Sufi ghazals on Sindhi are often known for their tenderness of music and spirituality, Sindhi is written in Devanagari and Arabic script. Sindhi translated "Quran Sharif" into their language in 1746 and the Bible in 1825, long before the British subjugated Sind in 1843. Recently, even the legend of love of Sassi-punn was given a Sufi subtone, when Sassi sang sachal, forgetting about everything in the world, in the desert before her union with Punnu.

Such traditions of Sufism as a spiritual asceticism, non-possession of the property and others in the 19th century were developed by Swami Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Swami Vivekananda, Swami Dayananda, Swami Ram Tirtha. In the 20th century they were maintained by Ranganathananda Swami and Swami Chidambaram who taught simplicity of worldly life in the heights of attainment of the spiritual life. (Kureishi Humara)

Among the famous students of the founder of Sufism in India, Moinuddin Chisti, was Qutub-ud-Din Bakhtiar. Near his tomb in Mehrauli (Delhi) flower festival "Full of Valon Ki Seyr" is celebrated. The festival, which was first celebrated during the reign of Ambar-Shah II, and became the most popular in the era of the last Mughal Emperor Shah Zafar, is still popular in all circles of society, from craftsmen to aristocrats. Moinuddin Chisti died in 1253. All his life he felt a great aversion to everything worldly and tried to stifle lowly exigencies in himself. His disciples maintaining this attitude to life were innumerable, and their number grew day to day. When Chisti died, he was recognized as a Sufi saint and buried in Ajmer Sharif temple. Since that time, every year on the day of his death thousands of Sufis gather from all around India and other Asian countries in Ajmer to celebrate Urs Ajmer. A vast column of people marches along the streets to Ajmer Sharif temple in order to pay tribute to their saint. The celebration lasts six days, and during that time a great multitude of pilgrim Sufis and tourists arrive at Ajmer desiring to watch the event. It can be said with confidence that no European who happened to see it even once will never forget it. (Gleditsch, 2017).

Surprisingly, this festival was held even under the British regime, its organization was interrupted only from 1942 to 1962 and was restored by Jawaharlal Nehru (Kerr, P. 2001; Siagian, et al,2019).

Of course, the main distributors of Sufi thought, as it is known, were poets, such as Amir Khusrow Dehlavi. They employed the secret language of metaphors and verbal cipher, and served as a defense against the vulgarization of the way of thinking as well as against accusations of heresy or civil disobedience (Kuldar Pranav).

Summary

Islam now has two traditions: one is ordinary, outward-facing or exoteric; the other is real Islam, or Sufism, and it is esoteric. With the penetration of Muslim ideology and culture in the Hindustan, Sufi sheikhs and poets enjoyed protection in the spread of Islam. They held discussions with representatives of different religions on the theme of spirituality, it was a time of flourishing of culture and art. By preaching the love of God, which was the staple of their spirituality, Sufis were able to acquaint Hindus with Islam. They were not missionaries in the conventional sense of the word, they were people inspired by the love of God, who wanted to gain His satisfaction by any action.

Sufis treated all people equally well, without giving importance to their religion, caste and tribal affiliation. The teachings of Bhakti about emotional attachment and love between a devotee (bhakta) and God in various forms, which gained power in Hinduism in the middle ages, developed under the direct influence of Sufism. Sufism is not a religion, not a belief in a complex of rituals, but the order and process of obtaining and implementing supra-rational knowledge.

Sufism propagates a rather austere way of life deprived of satiety or abundance, filled with innumerable prayers, sawms, repentance. Sufis believe that one can listen and submit only to the highest Master, in prayers they confess their utmost love for him, yearning for God and desire to meet with him in heaven as soon as possible. Sufis do not engage in the public life or work for the government or take up jobs in law enforcement agencies. Such religious bigots assume that people have to endure suffering suffer hardships all their life. They set at-tanzih attained by meditation and bringing one closer to the Creator as the main goal in life.

Among the many social and religious movements of India, during the last two thousand years, the Bhakti movement, popular between the 13th and 17th centuries, was the most outstanding because it did not distinguish between people of high and low birth, educated and illiterate, men and women. It opened the door of spiritual awareness and salvation for everyone. In addition, it became the basis for the modern socio-religious culture of India.

One of the greatest features of Indian civilization was that it was its Saints and Sufis, not kings and warriors, who ensured the achievement of the goals of revival and reformation. It is the wandering minstrels of ancient India with their ballads, storytellers and actors of the middle ages in performances (Kathak) who contributed to the evolution and merging into a single whole multi-tribal culture of India, cherishing in the people a sense of belonging to one great country.

Conclusions

In India, Sufism was typically Indian in nature and, even more typically, it was Sindhi Sufism in both its content and quality. As a purely domestic movement, it absorbed all the best of Islam and Hinduism, thus laying the foundation of a composite culture of India. As a nation, Indians have become fully committed, both culturally and socially, to the perception of the new creed – Sindhi Sufism advocated the improvement of the quality of life through the realization of God.

The Sufis had made great efforts to ensure the peaceful coexistence of different religions within a single society, although Muslims were a minority. The peoples of the Indian subcontinent have always found a common language, if they wanted it. Their once shared home was divided by politicians, who pursued their own selfish goals, covered by the reasoning about the public good.

Sufism has become a special mystical, religious and philosophical worldview within Islam, the followers of which consider that the direct spiritual communication (contemplation or connection) of a human with the deity is possible through personal psychological experience. True Sufis used sensual images to convey the mystical experience in their writings, considering God the embodiment of eternal beauty – the ode to human love and the hymn to God.

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