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Transnational Sufism and Charismatic Vernacular Based Teachings in Medieval Sub-Continent

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Abstract

The word vernacular refers to everyday language, the customized expressions that used by the people of a particular region. The vernacular is different from official or literary language. It is the way people really talk with each other, i.e. families talk at home. Vernacular in Sufism belongs to a mechanism through which the religious teachings and communications adapted in local regional environments despite Arabic language (a literary language).

The doctrines of Tasawwuf and its practices were influenced into sub-continent have a long history. The first Sufi saint arrived in sub-continent at the closing of the 11th century.¹ The Sufi saints accompanied with them the religious loyalty, devotion, enthusiasm and piety. They became the Ambassadors of social harmony and cultural integrity in sub-continent. They have contributed immensely in favor of the philosophy, Literature as well as theological ideas. In Sub-continent, the credit of “vernacularization” of Islam and Sufism for the most part goes to these Sufi saints. They challenged the Arabo-Persian linguistic dominance by providing literature concerning belief in divinity in vernacular dialects and languages, as a main stream of these Sufi saints depended less on Persian and Arabic in favor of making accessible to the general public by presenting the Sufi message in an understandable form. Sufi saints kept occupied the medium of vernacular poetry for disseminating the message of Tasawwuf towards the inhabitants. The prime objective of this article is to distinguish and analyze the impact of Tasawwuf campaign in sub-continent in the perspective of vernacularism. I have used in this research article two research methodologies one is the descriptive and the other is analytical. The

Anup Tanya, Sufi CULTS and evolution of Medieval Indian Culture, ICHR, Mongraph Series a ¹
Northern Book Centre, Darayaganyi, New Delhi, p. 01.

secondary source materials have been consulted as main sources for writing this research article.

Key Words: *Tasawwuf, Sufi, Vernacularism, Sub-continent, Linguistic hegemony, Dialects, etc.*

Introduction

Tasawwuf or Sufism is the name known as mysticism in the teachings of Islam. The term *Tasawwuf* comprises of philosophy as well as systematic proceedings that is pursued for spiritual union between man and God. The individuals who practice *Tasawwuf* are called Sufis or Saints and Mutasawwif, those individuals who seek to be *Sufis*.

Tasawwuf is a spiritual and saint feature of Islam. The foundation of *which* consist of six main vital beliefs or principles, the first and foremost is the believe in the existence and loneliness of Allah, the second is the faith on Prophethood, thirdly the believe on the day of resurrection, fourthly is the believe in the existence of Angels, fifth one is the believe about good and evil in Islam and the last one is the God's destiny. The roots of *Tasawwuf* lies with the life and character of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings may be upon him), who is the paragon leader for the entire groups of Sufism including Spiritualists, Mystics, Sufis, Faqirs, Darwishes, Pirs and Rishis. The disciples of these groups devoted their lives to gain the comprehensive knowledge of "*Tariqa't*" and "*Haqiqat*" in the light of the Qur'ān (due to its universal *Afaqi* tone) and *Sunnah* of the Prophet for achieving the actual aspiration of Islam.²

Islam in different regions to the followers other than Arabs has a faith promised adequate accommodation and flexibility for adjusting in wide-ranging socio-cultural contexts. For that reason, the universal principles of the religion were vernacularized during certain time and space, and contextualized forms and features of Muslim piety became prominent in these regions. Several Muslim religious practices in different regions have an effect of native culture, while

² Nizami, K.A., *Tarikh-i-Masha'kh-i-Chishti*, vol.1, p.15.

several of these activities are confined to particular locality. These exercises can easily be differentiated from the universal practices dealt out by all Muslims. Islamic Vernacularism is sometimes dismissed as simply “popular Islam” or “folk Islam” associated with *Tasawwuf*.³

Literature Review

A lot of existing researches on *Tasawwuf* focus on the tangible charisma of a Sufi saint⁴, on the Sufism, and Shrines of Sufi saints: An Introduction to the Study of Sufism with Special Reference to India and Pakistan⁵, Sufi music of India and Pakistan: sound, context and meaning in Qawwali⁶, Sufi poetry in the folk tradition of Indo-Pakistan⁷, and Contemplative Disciplines in Sufism⁸. However, a bit emphasis has been put down until now, on Impact of *Tasawwuf* Campaign in sub-Continent in the Perspective of Vernacularism.

***Tasawwuf* Campaign in Sub-Continent**

The sub-continent attracted various Sufis “*Darwishes*” from Arabia, Bukhara, Persia, Samarqand and Syria. Initially spread of Islam to sub-continent was dynamically influenced through such Arab traders; moreover, they were

³ Anjum, Tanvir (January-June, 2017). “Vernacularization of Islam and Sufism in South Asia: A Study of the Production of Sufi Literature in Local Languages” Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan, Vol. 54, No. 1

⁴ Werbner, Pina., Helene. Basu, (1998). *Embodying Charisma: Modernity, Locality and Performance of Emotion in Sufi Cults*. London: Routledge.

⁵ Subhan, J. A. (1960). *Sufism, Its Saints and Shrines: An Introduction to the Study of Sufism with Special Reference to India and Pakistan*. Lucknow Publishing House.

⁶ Qureshi, R. (1986). *Sufi music of India and Pakistan: sound, context and meaning in Qawwali* (Vol. 1). CUP Archive.

⁷ Asani, A. S. (1988). Sufi poetry in the folk tradition of Indo-Pakistan. *Religion & Literature*, 81-94.

⁸ Valiuddin, M. (1980). *Contemplative Disciplines in Sufism*. East-West Publications.

responsible for arriving of Sufis to Eastern and Western coasts of the sub-continent. Those ascetic Sufis practiced philosophical synthesis and social behavior. Most of the Sufi *Shaikhs* (spiritual leader) were treated as inferior by the crown heads. Due to the noble deeds, powerful spiritual attainments and liberal out looking of *Mutasawwifs*, they left an inerasable impression on the socio-religious setup (locale) of Hindu communities.

Sufis and their Orders

The Ghaznavi and Ghori courts expedited *Tasawwuf* campaign in sub-continent. During the 13th century the Sufi brotherhood came out to be firmly strengthened in northern areas of sub-continent⁹. *Khwājā Mu'īn al-Dīn Chishtī* (d.1236) a Persian Muslim preacher and founder of *Chisht* order regarded as an early Sufi of the region¹⁰. He had learnt “Hindustani” language in Multan prior to settle in *Ajmer*¹¹.

The religious elite *Ulamas* and the *Sufi* Mystics of Medieval sub-continent, had endured with non-Islamic traditions. *Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya* (the fourth Spiritual Successor of *Khwājā Mu'īn al-Dīn Chishtī*) had focused attention on love as medium of realizing God. It involved the love of humanity. A distinguished scholar, Sufi musician and great poet *Amīr Khusrow Dehlavī*, were responsible for the conversion of a huge population into Islam. He is the founder of the *Chishti-Nizami* order. Some of the well-known *Sufis* who belonged to *Suhrawardi* order including *Amir Husayan*, *Ruknuddin* and *Shaikh Sadrudin Arif* as well as belonged to *Naqshbandī* order including *Khwājā Bāqī Billāh* be

⁹ *ibid*, p. 345.

¹⁰ Annie Marie, Schimmel, (1975), *Sufism in Indo – Pakistan, Mystic Dimension of Islam*, Chapel Hill, p. 346.

¹¹ Muhammad Aslam, *Malfuzati adab ki tarikhī ahammiyyat* (Lahore: Research Society of Pakistan, 1995), p. 339.

assigned as an influential factor in Indo- Muslim life. These ordinary Sufi orders were vastly accountable for spreading of Islamic teachings in sub-continent.

Influences

1. Evolutionary progress of Literature and Poems.
2. Emphasized on the significance of annihilation “*fana*” in seeking God.
3. Active role in Indian religion and politics.
4. A Mughal empire Princess *Jehanara* was a famous female *Sufi* Saint of *Qadiriyya* Order. She created two written work on *Tasawwuf* named *Mu'nis al-Arvāḥ* (the confident of spirits) and a partial biography of *Mullah Shah* (her spiritual mentor).
5. The Sufi orders in sub-continent embraced local traditions from ascetics affiliated with other religions. A movement promoting inter-religious dialogues were held.

Linguistic and Cultural Hegemony Challenges in Producing Religious Literature in Vernacular Languages and Dialects

The Sufis challenged the linguistic and cultural hegemony of the ashraf(the ruling elite), by various means.

The Saints immigrated to sub-continent from other regions made themselves familiar with the local linguistic environment. Simultaneously, the Sufis could also verbalize other languages which may include Bengali, Bihari, Dakkani, Marathi, Punjabi, Rajasthani, Sindhi, Tamil, and Telugu, etc. in wide-ranging geographical and socio-cultural circumstances.

Arabic was known as the language of wisdom and instruction of Islamic religion. On the other hand, Persian was seen as the language of the administration; moreover, sovereign leaders treat with apparent kindness to the prose-writers, historians and poets for writing in Arabic and Persian languages. For that reason, the requisite to translate and vernacularize religion in native perspective was felt. The *Mutasawwifs* were the major mediators of cultural

cognition of the natives and the migrants, that's why, uniting the gap between the civilian and the elite, referred to as “*Ashraf*” and “*Ajlaf*”.

The *Sufi khanqahs* also refer to “*Ribat*” (residential teaching centers of Saints) were the stations where people belong to different beliefs and cultures, diverse shades of outlook, and speaking dissimilar languages gathered as well as intercommunicate with one another, making the *khanqahs* bases of cultural combination. Such teaching centers make use of native languages and dialects liberally.¹²

***Sufis* and *Ulama* are Different in Views Regarding Vernacularism**

Asim Roy disclosed that *Sufis* like “cultural mediators” were had considerable skills to dispute the religio-cultural command of the *Ulama*. Those traditionalist *Ulama* had not permitted the dissemination and diffusion of Islamic teachings in local languages. As a result, Muslims in sub-continent were incompetent in following the religious, guidance assignments and duties in Arabic and Persian languages¹³. This “Brahmanization” of Islamic teachings formed by the socio-linguistic domination of the *Ulama* was defiance by the *Sufis*.

Momentous Works by *Sufis*

Such revolutionary visions and strives of the *Sufis* for preaching the Holy *Qur'ān* other than Arabic took up with its translation in the language of Persian.

¹² Anjum, Tanvir, (January-June, 2017). “Vernacularization of Islam and Sufism in South Asia: A Study of the Production of Sufi Literature in Local Languages” Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan, Vol. 54, No. 1, p 211.

¹³ Asim Roy, The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), pp. 58-83.

A Suhrawardi sufi *Makhdum Nuh* (1500-1590), in Sindh, is reported to have translated the holy *Qur'ān*, in Persian language¹⁴. It might be indicated as the 1st ever translation of the *Qur'ān* in Persian language in South Asia.

Scholarly *Sufi Shah Rafi ud Din* (d. 1818) son of Shah Wali-Allah translated *Qur'ān "Faiq -ul- Bayan"* in literal Urdu, known as the first Urdu translation, while *Shah Abd al-Qadir* (d. 1813) rendered its idiomatic translation in Urdu language¹⁵.

Shah Fazle Rahman (d. 1895) was a *Naqshbandi Sufi*, and the founder of *Silsilah-i Rahmaniyya*, used to freely deliver the sacred verses of the holy *Qur'ān* into informal *Purabi-Hindi* dialect, moreover his some followers used to document it. Some complete chapters "*surahs*" or their sections were rendered. Later on, published with the title "*Mannmohan ki batain*"¹⁶. In this translation and interpretation the religious diction and vocabulary occupied are very unconventional and unusual, as they have been derived from Hindi and Sanskrit dialects. For example, *Fazle Rahman* renders the term "*Allah*" as *Ishwar* and *Parameshwar*, and similarly interprets the terms "*Nabi*" and "*Rasul*" as *Avatar*.

With the exception of the Quranic translations and interpretations, the *Sufis* also attempted to vernacularize different manners of worship too. Farīd al-Dīn Mas'ūd Ganj-i-Shakar (d. 1271), famous *Chishti Sufi* of 13th century, of

¹⁴ Annemarie Schimmel, *Pearls from the Indus: Studies in Sindhi Culture* (Jamshoro & Hyderabad: Sindhi Adabi Board, 1986), p. 55.

¹⁵ Aziz Ahmad, "Political and Religious Ideas of Shah Wali-Ullah of Delhi," in *Shah Waliullah: His Religious and Political Thought*, ed. M. Ikram Chaghatai (Lahore: Sang-eMeel, 2005), p. 164.

¹⁶ *Shah Fazle Rahman Ganj Muradabadi, Mannmohan ki batain* [Purabi-Hindi tr. of Select Verses and Surahs of the Quran], ed. Nazar Ali Khan (Patna: Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, n.d.).

Pakpattan, usually recommend *dhikr* (remembrance of Allah) to the local inhabitant in Punjabi dialect¹⁷. One more *Chishti Sufi*, *Shah Fakhr al-Din of Delhi* (d. 1784) was courageous and confident a much to proclaim that the Friday sermon “*khutba juma*” prior to congregational prayer should be read in Hindavi dialect¹⁸, in order to that message could be sensed by the general natives who could not be familiar with Arabic language.

In such a manner these *Sufis* struggled to knock over the linguistic obstruction in pursuance of making Islamic as well as *Sufi* traditions and teachings look more momentous. Besides language and dialects, *Sufis* also rendered the teachings of *Tasawwuf* into a more regionally recognizable cultural worldview of native population. It was why these Sufis had come up as an unusual position of religious authority in addition to the *Ulama*.

Chishti Sufi, *Shaykh Hamid al-Din Suwali* (d. 1278) of *Nagaur* often conversed in *Hindavi* dialect¹⁹. According to Amir Khurd, Baba Farid could speak the local language²⁰. One more *Chishti Sufi*, *Saiyyid Banda Nawaz Gaisu Daraz* (d. 1422) could speak *Hindavi* dialect.²¹

¹⁷ Shah Kalim-Allah Jehanabadi, *Kashkol-i kalimi* (Delhi: Matba., Mujtabai“, 1308 AH), p. 25.

¹⁸ Shah Fakhr al-Din Dehlawi, *Fakhr al-talibin wa manaqib-i Fakhriyya* (Delhi: Matba., Mujtabai“, 1315 AH/1897-98 AD), p. 23.

¹⁹ Shaykh Farid al-Din Mahmud, *Surur al-sudur*, MS, Mawlana Azad Library, Muslim University, Aligarh, Farsi *Tasawwuf*, No. 21/161, f. 8.

²⁰ Amir Khurd Saiyyid Muhammad ibn Mubarak „*Alawi Kirmani, Siyar al-Awliya*“ (comp. in 1351-82 A.D.), ed. Chiranji Lal (Delhi: Muhibb-i Hind Press, 1302 A.H./1885 A.D.), p. 183.

²¹ Aslam, *Malfuzati Adab kee Tarikhi Ahmiyyat*, Lahore: Research Society of Pakistan, University of the Punjab, 1995, p 339.

While the congregations in the *khanqah* of *Sharfuddin Ahmed Yahya Maneri* (d. 1381) in *Patna* of *Bihar* were conducted in the Persian language, but he conversed towards the native inhabitants in their local dialect²².

Shaykh Ahmad Khattu (d. 1447) a *Sufi* saint of *Silsila-e-Maghrabia*, lived in *Sarkhej* near *Ahmadabad* in *Gujarat*. He knew and spoke *Rajasthani* “*Gojri*” dialect and *Hindi* language as well²³.

A number of *Sufis* composed philosophical and theosophical works on prose as well as poetry on the themes of *Tasawwuf* in local languages and dialects for the common people.

Development of New or Existing Literary Genres

The *Sufis* saints in sub-continent also contributed in the development of modern and new-fashioned literary styles. They also took part in improving and familiarizing the existing ones. They produced various classical forms of *Sufi* poetry like *sīharfī* and *kafī* in *Sindhi* and *Punjabi* poetic traditions. They introduced a unique work on the literary genre know as *Prem-kahani* or “*Sufi Romances*” and *Ginan* prose. Such literatures were patterned on the extensive genre *masnavi* (Persian poetic literature). Its central theme was the *Sufi*’s conception of “*ishq*” of human soul for Allah. Its composers rendered the *Sufi* doctrine into a well-known native customary world by using symbols. The most primitive composer of *Prem-kahani* is *Chandayan* or *Laur Chanda* composed by

²² In *Quest of God: Maneri’s Second Collection of 150 Letters*, Eng tr. of *Sharaf al-Din Ahmad Yahya Maneri’s Letters*, with introduction, and notes *Paul Jackson* (Anand; Gujarat: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 2004), see Introduction, p. xx

²³ *K. A. Nizami*, “*Shaikh Ahmad Maghrabi as a Great Historical Personality of Medieval Gujarat*,” *Medieval India: A Miscellany*, Vol. III (Aligarh: Centre of Advanced Study, Dept. of History, Aligarh Muslim University, 1975), p. 255.

Mulla Daud in 1378-80. He was a *Chishti-Nizami Sufi*²⁴. Another work wrote on the romance of *Sufi* inspiration titled “*Mrigavati*” by *Ali kutban*, a disciple of *Suhrawardi Sufi* saint, *Shaykh Burhan* in 1503²⁵. The both works were written in *Awadhi* dialects. Among them a noteworthy script in the *Sufi* tradition is *Chitravali* composed by “*Uthman Ghazipuri*” a disciple of a *Chishti Sufi*, *Baba Haji*, written in 1613²⁶. This poem was written in *Braj Bhasha* dialect.

These all poets were allegiances to any one of the *Sufis* groups, and their poetry were interpreted in the context of *Tasawwuf* as well. Mystic experiences explained here the *Sufi* idea of love.

The *Khoja* branch of *Ismailis* produced *Ismaili sufi* literature. It includes “*Ginan*”, a distinctive genre literature in “*Indic*” (a branch of the Indo-Iranian family of languages) vernacular languages. The most famous *Pir Sayyid Sadrudin Al-Husayni* (d. 1400) composed *Ginans* in many languages and dialects of *Punjabi*, *Sindhi*, *Saraiki*, *Gujrati* and *Hindi*. Afterward, *Pir Hasan Kabiruddin* (d. 1470) also composed *Ginans*. In such scriptures, they wrote in vernacular style by using symbol for the human soul “a bride” awaiting the divine which symbolized by “a groom”²⁷.

Concluding Remarks

In the history of sub-continent, feature which never to be forgotten of the medieval as well as existing era was the exposure of different religious groups. While *Mutasawwifs* “the saints” through *Tasawwuf* campaign played an important role in developing love towards Allah as well as promulgating the message of

²⁴ Mawlana Daud Dalmai, Chandayan, ed. Parmeshwari Lal (Bombay: Hindi GranthRatnakar, 1964).

²⁵ Syed Hasan Askari, Aspects of the Cultural History of Medieval Bihar (Patna: Kashi Prasad Jayswal Research Institute, 1984), p. 20.

²⁶ Sansar Chandra, Some Prominent Muslim Hindi Poets (Delhi: Atma Ram, 1986), p. 61.

²⁷ Ali S. Asani, “The Ismaili Pir Sadr ad-Din,” in Tales of God’s Friends, pp. 261-68.

truth. Because of their moralized teachings along with profess, there were a lot of religious, political and social changes had come into being. The vernacular *Sufi* prose and poetry to a great extent contributed to the promulgation of the traditions, ethics and morals of *Tasawwuf* among the local community. The *Sufi* folk literature like poetry imparted a central link between Muslims and Hindus. Hence, the impact of *Tasawwuf* campaign in sub-continent in the perspective of vernacularism was a productive.