

## Spatial Geographical Distribution of Sufism and Its Impact on Cultural Transformation of India

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Sufism mainly comes with the Islam; but it is not the Islam, indeed it is assimilation of all the practices, beliefs, tradition of different Islamic and non-Islamic cultures. The mystic tradition of sufism gained significant ground in Punjab region, Delhi, Ajmer, Bengal and other parts of India with the establishment of the Delhi sultanate and its territorial expansion and Islam. According to Abul Fazl there were fourteen Sufi orders in India. Among them *Chishtiya*, *Suhrawardia*, *Qadira* and *Firdousia* were more popular and none of the fourteen orders was mentioned by Abul Fazl; gave its genesis of origination in India. But later many orders came to existence which originated of India as *Firdousia*, *Madaria* and *Rishi* etc. Each and every *silsilas* relied around a few of its prominent adherents who took little lime in curving out their own *wilayat* (spiritual territories) and established and elaborated network of *khanqaha* (hospices), *khalifas* (successors) and *khadims* (disciples) in the subcontinents.

Sufism has been lively debated among different set of historians; some historians like Tarachand, M. Habib, K. A. Nizami, Satish Chandra, S.A.A. Rizvi emphasized on the great influence of Sufism in Indian society and culture, while on the other hand, Simon Digby and Richard M. Eaton largely focused on the political impact of Sufis on Indian sub-continent. Moreover, European missionary and Colonial scholars attempted to show the role of Sufis in another perspective of conversion of indigenous people to the manifold of Islam. H. K. Naqvi also tried to reveal from his work about the role of Sufism in the development of trade and the urbanization.

My first part of the tutorial focus on the impacts of Sufis on Indian society, polity and economy during medieval period are concerned. Generally speaking, in medieval India, Sufis were adherent to spirituality, peace, love, humanity, social harmony and coexistence even with the common people and lower class of the society. They were able to exercise substantial influence on the life and thoughts of people of all classes and communities irrespective of caste, creed and religion. Thus, they had left a prevailing impact on religious, cultural, and social life of India. In addition, they were instrumental in the social, economic, and philosophic development in India. Besides preaching moral teaching and social harmony in major cities and centers, Sufis reached out to poor and marginalized rural communities and taught in local dialects such as Sindhi, Hindavi and Bengali etc. thus, one can see that Sufism emerged as a moral and comprehensive socio-religious liberal force that even influenced other social rituals and traditions as well as played significant role in the formation of the Indian society with the flavor of tolerance. They were also

responsible for social stability of the society and maintain spirit of Islam together with respect of other fact.<sup>1</sup>

In this way, one of the major impacts of Sufis on Indian society was providing a common platform for both Hindus and Muslims. Some scholars saw it as a process of Hindu-Muslim unity.<sup>2</sup> It can be right to say that the Sufis helped the rulers in their own way by creating an atmosphere of opinion in which people who follows different sects and religion could live in peace and harmony.<sup>3</sup> Early Sufis especially of Chishti order freely mingled with all class of people also of lower class not only Muslims but also Hindus.<sup>4</sup> Sufis were how popular in all class we can see this by one example that Sufis easily made their centers in those areas where majority population was of Hindus. Hamid-ud-din Nagauri made Nagaur as his chief center which was a pre-dominant Hindu population. Large numbers of non-Muslims were attracted to Sufis because of their liberal attitude. The Sufi attitude of non-discrimination, which made their shrine a place where all could come without any hesitation, not only made them popular but also helped to relieve social tensions. The people of different religion lives in harmony for such a longer time in villages were an effect of teachings of these Sufis to some extent. In this context, it may be termed Sufis were servants of humanity. But it does not mean that Sufis of all orders were liberal. One should bear in mind that there were also some orthodox sufi order such as Suhrawardi and Naqshabndi.

It is matter of debate among historians that to what degree Sufi Shaikhs had political influence? Nevertheless, it is a fact that their influence over the society and culture in medieval India particularly during fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was extraordinary. It was commonly thinking that because of having *karamat*(miraculous powers), *barakat*(beatitude benediction), *kharq-iAdat* (Shaikh's intervention in the ordinary course of nature), *wilayat* (spiritual territory) and amulets, they held powers for the making and unmaking of kings and kingdom. For instance, the prominent Sufi, Shiakh Ali Hujwery wrote a theoretical basis for the large assumption of supernatural powers, 'God has *Aulia* (*Aulia*, pl. of *Wali*) whom he has specially distinguished by his friendship and whom, He has chosen to be the governors of his kingdom. He has made the saints governors of Universes. Through the blessing of their advent the rain falls from heaven and through the purity of their

<sup>1</sup> M.Z.A. Shakeb, *Role of Sufis in Changing Society of Deccan 1500-1750*, Oneworld Publications, 1999, p.374

<sup>2</sup> Tara Chand, *Influence Of Islam On Indian Culture*, 2004.

<sup>3</sup> Satish Chandra, *Medieval India: From Sultanate To The Mughals 1206-1526*, Har Anand Publications, 2007, p.189

<sup>4</sup> But as we see on the contrary of it the founder of Suhrawardisilsila that was Shaikh Bahaud-din Zakariya not mix with common people and wandering dervishes but the doors of Chishtis were opened for all.

lives the plants spring up from the earth and through their spiritual influence Muslims gain victories over unbelievers.”<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Shaikh Nizamuddin Aulia stated, “from this place to that *Mouza* (place), which is at a distance of so many *Karhs* from here and where these is a *hauz* (tank), it is my territory. You will reach that place safely. From that place to Multan, it comes under the charge of Shaikh Bahauddin.”<sup>6</sup> Like Sufism of Northern India, Sufis of Southern India also were very influential in the socio-religious culture. Moreover, Some Sufis of Bijapur were wealthy or actively involved in politics and participated in warfare were defined by Richard Eaton as ‘warrior sufis’ or as *zamindars* respectively.<sup>7</sup> They directory claimed the political authority in the state. Similar to the Sufis of Northern India, common people and ruling class believed in the authorities of Sufis in term of bestowing kingdom and making and unmaking kings. For instance, the founder of Bahmani dynasty (1326-1799), Hasan Ganguh is said to have received tiding of his future sovereign from Shiakh Nizamuddin Aulia. Once, Shaikh Nizamuddin Aulia invited and gave a general invitation to a special meal at *Khanqah*, in which the sultan of future Mohammad bin Tughlaq had come. As soon as he left the Shaikh said, “a sultan had gone and another sultan is coming.”<sup>8</sup> The Shaikh sent a servant to bring in sultan Hasan Ganguh. The Shaikh gave him round bread; which was pronounced by him an umbrella of sovereignty which would long endure. On the same line, Farishta also described about Shaikh Khwand Mir, how much he had the political and social influence in Adil Shahi dynasty and he directorially claimed the establishment of the kingdom or its transformation depends on Sufi Shaikh. He wrote, “once it came to light from the tong of Shaikh Wais popularly known as Shaikh Khwand Mir Hure, grandson of Makhdum Shaikh Siraj Junaidi that he had gotten the *badshahi* (kingdom) in real sense. The Shaikh asked those subjects to vacate their houses whose houses were very close to the minaret of Shaikh Siraj Junaidi. They complained against him to Dastur al-Muluk, minister of the sultanate. He said that kings had given (lands) to them (shaikhs) not in vice-versa. When this news reached to Shaikh Khwand Mir, he said that we have given *badshahi* to kings...”<sup>9</sup> It very clearly throws light on the political authority of Sufi saints in the sense that *badshahat* always is given by God to an eligible person through *wali-i Allah*. This kind of believes had highly influenced the Sultans of Bijapur along with publics. That is why, the sultans often used to visit *khanqah* or *dragah* with a view to fulfillment of their desires.

It is interesting to know in spite of being all mystical tradition their perceptible differences among them in term of material life or association with the state. The *Chishtis* were mostly keep aloof themselves from courts whereas *Suhrawardis* showed their activeness in establishing relations with the court as well as receiving gifts, endowments and titles

from Sultans. For instance, the founder of *Suhrawardisilsila* in India, Shaikh Bahauddin Zakariya Multani invited sultan of Delhi to Multan to annex Multan and after it, he developed close connection with Ilutmish more over he also accepted the title of ‘*shaikh-ul Islam*’.<sup>10</sup> The existing Sufis either Chishtis or others never questioned the existing political system and class structure. It is true that sometimes they advised state officials to show some kindness in the collection of land revenue.

The above statements clearly shed lights on the indirect political power of Sufis in the form of spiritual or divine power penetrated in people’s minds during medieval period. And there was common blind belief among masses the Sufi Shaikhs were more powerful the kings because of their super natural powers, miracles display, divine grace, true predictions etc. Above all, they thought that rules were afraid of their presence that is why they used to go before Shaikhs for their prosperity. As, Simon Digby and Richard M. Eaton attempted to point out their political authority. It is also apparent from many anecdotes in the hagiographical literatures, which indirectly show the authority of Sufi Shaikhs in medieval period of India. But some of the historians like K.A. Nizami and Athar Ali Abbas Rizvi are not in favor of their political authority.

As far as the impacts of Sufism on economic are concerned, Sufis were not directly involved in any kind of making economic strategies or economic policies. However, gathering of large number of people in and around the seat of the *khanqah* or *dargah* gave boost up to the new settlement and paved the way for the urbanization. Further, around them, small trading activities were started and gradually big markets were developed as the number of devotees increased and the settlement was expanded. On the occasion of annual celebrations (*urs*) and the *muhrram* large number of pilgrims coming from outside also gave impetus to the trading activities. The devotion of the rulers and local *zamindars* to the saints also played a significant role in the development of a place into urban and trade center. Their construction activities created employment opportunities for different kinds of people. Large number of skilled and unskilled workers gathered there and enlarged the population. Lastly these centers became the place of love and affection. Adoption of local customs and traditions by the saints also played an important role in promoting the concept of brotherhood which also became an important factor for the expansion of urban centers. In this way, *Khanqahs* and *dragah* were the centers of socio-economic function and contributed to economic life in various ways. Some of them undertook the cultivation of waste lands. Others were involved in the construction of buildings both of religious as well as public utility. Thus, the *Khanqah* institution also played an important role in the process of urbanization on the one hand and trade, commerce and production of local handicrafts on the other. Sufis advocated labor in which crafts and agriculture given primacy.

Institution of Dargah led to the emergence of powerful Sufi families whose landed interests often led them to support established order. Political distance of *wilayat* from centres also influence the control of pirs in social and economic resources to some extent. The state endowments to sufis also

<sup>5</sup>Shaikh Ali Hujwiri, *Kashf al-Mahjoob*, (Urdu tr.), Rizvi Kitab Ghar, Delhi, (2009), p. 311-12

<sup>6</sup>Hasan Ala Sijzi, *FawidulFuwad*, Publisher M.R. Printer (2007), p. 137-138

<sup>7</sup> Richard Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur, 1300-1700: Social Role of Sufis in Medieval India*, Princeton University Press, 1978.

<sup>8</sup> Simon Digby, ‘The Sufi Shaykh and the Sultan: A Conflict of Claims to Authority in Medieval India’, *Iran*, Vol. 28 (1990), pp. 71-81

<sup>9</sup> Bashir Uddin, *Waqiyat-iMamlakat-iBijapur*, .pp. 31-42

<sup>10</sup>Simon Digby, ‘The Sufi Shaykh and the Sultan: A Conflict of Claims to Authority in Medieval India’, *Iran*, Vol. 28 (1990), pp. 71-81

helped them in changing them and their families into landed elites. When sufis tried to consolidate their influence sometimes they get into economic activity.<sup>11</sup> The institution of Dargah provided a common stage for inter-tribal trade as well as festival. It was a place for people either nomadic or settled where they could dispose their surplus whether it would be cattle or crops or manufactured goods. The 'urs' was a time when resources were redistributed. Shrines became center for economic activity and huge amount of commercial business.<sup>12</sup> Thus, the economic importance of urs can be decided by the number of people who attended it like the urs of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar at sehwan regularly attracted over 30,000 people. Sindh emerges as the upcoming center of flourishing trade by the seventeenth century in cloth of a very high quality woven from cotton from different areas and raw material from rural areas where collected in shrines and producers took it from there as well as shrines helped to create a market for finished goods. In Sindh the shrines were integrated into long distance trade both between Sindh and outside world and between outside world and rest of Indian subcontinent. In this way by viewing the example of Sindh we can conclude that shrines were slowly incorporated into instruments which regulated the wider economy of a transforming Sindh.<sup>13</sup>

As we have seen the impact of tribe in commercial activity. Now, we will discuss about another area of economic activity that is agriculture. In the area of agriculture, we can understand it by the transformation of some sufis into landed elites and some who made landed elites or feudal lords as Baba Farid who helped Jats in changing from Shudras to feudal elites. The shrine of Baba Farid also patronized the agricultural clans. In Bengal as Richard Eaton describes the role of Sufi pirs in the extension of cultivation. It is true that people started cutting the forests for cultivation before the coming of Muslims in the 16<sup>th</sup> century as the role of holy men or charismatic pioneers was discussed here who encourage the local people for rice cultivation. It is not true that the local people themselves unknown from it but the religious zeal amplify this cultivation process.<sup>14</sup> Shifting of delta was the main reason for this increase in rice cultivation but the work of charismatic pioneers can't be neglected. The Khanqah also played important role in the process of urbanization as we can see that the khanqah had the major role in economic activities. As in the remote areas the Khanqahs were the center of exchange of commodities and place where people can put their surpluses. Khanqah also took response of establishing markets and in this way the Khanqah becomes the center of trade economy. We know that in the Sultanate period the trading centers largely emerged as urban centers like Multan, Sindh etc. So, we can see that this way the center emerges as the popular urban centers. As one can see in case Sufis in Rajasthan.

Addressing the tutorial on geographical front, Moinuddin Chishti (d. 1236 A.D.) who had come to India and then finally settled in Ajmer had extraordinarily engaged himself in social

welfare without violent bloodshed or forced conversion. Thus, until today, both Muslims and non-Muslims both visit the famous tomb of Moinuddin Chishti; it has become even a popular tourist and pilgrimage destination.

Because of this, trade system enhanced, and travelers and the merchants came into scene, who played a vital role in the exploration of routes. Sufis were the sort of people who made the world known by moving relentlessly from east to west and north to south. The town is a good marketing and trade centre for the adjoining rural population. The location of *khanqahs* or *dargahs* on the medieval highway and trade routes also proved favorable for its growth as an urban center. For instance, a trader of Nagaur carried mustard (*sarso*) from Nagaur and sold it to Multan and further carried cotton from Multan and sold these to Nagaur. This location involved as a mediator for the correspondence between Shaikh Bahauddin Zakaria Suhrawardi of Multan and Shaikh Hamiduddin Chishti of Nagaur. Besides these, many more *khanqahs* and *dargahs* were located on trade routes. As some important routes that passed through Nagaur can be shown below:

#### External route:

- Nagaur to Multan : This route frequently used by a trader
- Delhi to Malwa : Gwalior and Nagaur attached with this routes
- Agra to Nagaur : Agra – Tonk – Toda – Nagaur.
- Mewat to Bikaner : Mewat Region – Nagaur – Bikaner.
- Multan to Jodhpur : Multan-Bahawalpur-Pugal-Bikaner-Nagaur-Jodhpur.
- Jodhpur to Kashmir : Jodhpur-Nagaur-Hardesar-Nohar-Sirsa-Bhatinda-Amritsar- Kashmir.
- Bikaner to Deccan : Bikaner – Nagaur – Merta-Bundi-Kota-Jhalara-Patan-Ujjai-Deccan
- Delhi to Ahmadabad/Gujarat : Delhi-Narayana-Narhad-Reni-Nagaur-Ajmer-Ahmadabad/Gujrat
- Agra to Ahmadabad/Gujarat : Agra-Nagaur-Ahmadabad/Gujarat
- Ajmer to Ahmadabad : Nagaur was connected to this route.

#### Internal Routes:

There were many internal trade routes which were connected to the important towns (Sufi centres) of Rajasthan. The routes were highly beneficial to the traders, *banjaras*, and provided various types of transport facilities, if needed. The important internal routes are mentioned below:

- Nagaur to Pugal : Nagaur-Bikaner-Pugal
- kota to Nagaur : kota-Bundi-Deoli-Ajmer-Merta-Nagaur
- Bikaner to Jaipur : Bikaner-Nagaur-Rupnagar-Jaipur
- Bikaner to (Jodhpur) : Bikaner-Nagaur-Khiwasar-Jodhpur(Mandor)
- Bikaner to Pali : Bikaner-Nagaur-Jodhpur-Pali
- Bikaner to Udaipur : Bikaner-Nagaur-Pali-Desuri-Udaipur

<sup>11</sup>S.F.D.Ansari, *Sufi Saints and State Power: The Pirs of Sindh*, Cambridge University Press, 1992, p.8

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, pp.28-29.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p.29.

<sup>14</sup>Richard Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204-1760*, University of California Press, 1993 pp. 195-228

- Rajgarh to Pali : Rajgarh-Churu-Nawalgarh-Didwana-Nagaur-Pali
- Jaisalmer to Jaipur : Jaisalmer-Pokaran-Phalodi-Nagaur-Rupnagar-Jaipur

The above trade routes were helpful in the growth of both internal and external trades of Nagaur and Ajmer during the medieval period. Apart from these, several buildings were constructed and mosques were built during Sultanate and Mughal period which underlines the fact how the geography of the region were well connected and how it affected the trifold scenario in economy, polity and society.<sup>15</sup>

To conclude, the impact of Sufism on Indian society, polity and economy can't be neglected as a whole but it is also wrong to say that it marked a transformation in India. Satish Chandra righteously argued that it is an exaggeration to entitle Sufis as a means of social and Cultural Revolution. In fact, although the Sufis opened their door for everyone, teach the lesson of social harmony and show liberal attitude but in spite of all these they accepted the logic of existing class structure at broader social and political level. They did not see any alternative for it or did not try to change it, The Shaikhs of Sindh, Punjab and other areas had close relation with the tribes and the conversion in these areas has tribal patterns. Sufis solved the basic issues of tribe and sometimes change the social status of tribes and increase it.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, the medieval cities, Lahore, Multan, Ajmer, Nagaur, Delhi, Daulatabad, Burhanpur, Gulbarga, Bijapur, Golconda and many more were not merely mystic canters of eminence but also have pan-India character. Sufis made significant contributions in greatly building inter-regional culture and also served as centers for localized expressions of Muslim religiosity and ritual practices. These sufi saintly shrines in much sense promoted the integration of different communities, cultural forms and socio-political and economic structures in wider geographical terms.

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<sup>16</sup> Richard M. Eaton, *India's Islamic Traditions 711-1750*, Oxford University Press, 2003, pp.272-274