

rites and Ceremonies: The Practice of Contemporary Sufi Orders & Sub-orders in Sub Continent

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Abstract

Sufism is an Islamic mysticism, a path that emerged after the foundation of Islam in 7th century A.D. Prophet Muhammad (SAW) is the greatest master of all the Sufis of Ummah irrespective of their sects such as Hanafi, Shafai, Malaki, Hambali and Jafri. The companions specially the Ashaab-e-Sufah (companions of shade or mosque-rugs) of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and first four blessed caliphs got directives about Sufism from Prophet Muhammad (SAW).

The most important ceremonies related to Sufism are Dhikr and Sama. These serve as an individual's entry into a practice of teachings. Beside these two major rites or worship there are some other practices such as Haal and Maqam. (State and Station). These ceremonies vary from one Sufi order to another based on the different spiritual paths. This paper will discuss the brief description of the rituals and ceremonies performed by the Sufi orders and sub-orders in sub-continent. All four Sufi orders i.e. Naqshbandiya, Qadriya, Chishtiya, Suharwardiya will be taken into account. The purpose of the study is to argue that Sufi ritual performances motivate way of compassion and harmony for both secular and non-secular stratum. To assess the range of contemporary ceremonies is not possible to describe in this study however an attempt has been made to elaborate on the Muslim Sufi religious ceremonies in the socio-religious system of the sub-continent. This would thus add to the recent debate related to the relations between societies and states that are represented and maintained in the sub-continent.

Keywords: *Islamic Mysticism, Dhikr and Sama, State and Station, Sufi order, Socio-Religious System & Secular and Non-Secular Stratum.*

Introduction

Sufism follows similar ritual prayers and rituals as ordained in the teachings of Islam i.e. five time prayers on daily basis, fast in the month of Ramadan, performing taraveeh and other festivals like Eid ul fitr, Eid uz zaha etc are the part of the Sufi holy datebook and included in their daily routine.

The foremost practice of Sufism is the path to union with Allah. For this purpose Sufis develop the inner and outer both dimensions of devout practices, private and public. Taking into consideration of the Quranic passage that states that "Anywhere you turn there is the face of Allah" (2:115), the Sufi devotes the self to carry out inner life which the external and internal dimensions of all present in the universe direct to the insight of Allah. The main focus of the Sufi is the desire to be closer to the creator and to unite with the creator.

Sufi's teachings becomes the part of the people's psyche, high esteems are given to these dignified souls on the occasion of their birth or death anniversaries. These tributes has taken the form of blissful celebrations and turned out to be the festival form. The main objective of all the Sufi practices is the realization and to attain a position of regular and stable remembrance of Allah i.e. to constantly remain in the existence of Allah. The aim of the spiritual practices is to shed away the ego which is the main hurdle in the realization of the self. The core of the Sufi teachings is love.

Rituals: Prayers, Dhikr, Sama

The ritual prayer or Dhikr is the central method on the path of Sufism. Dikhr (remembrance, originated from the Quranic command to remember Allah in Surah 62 verse 10). However there is no record in the history that the companions of he Prophet Muhammad perform Dhikr as ceremonial practice as one sight of the Prophet (SAW) could raise a person's realization. After the Prophet's death the individuals found in Dhikr a critical means to achieve the state of remembrance similar to the companions of the Prophet (SAW).

Although Sufism originated just after the demise of the Prophet Muhammad in 632 but it was not extended or develop into orders till 12th Century.

Dhikr is a core practice of Sufism and may be recited aloud or in silence by heart. These two types are called Jalli and Khafi. Qadriya, Chishtiya, Suharwardiya orders practice and stress on Jalli (vocal) form of Dhikr while Naqshbandiya order practice Khafi (silently in the heart) however both form of Dhikr offer the same benefits as they differ in technique only. These forms are justified in directions given by the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). Dhikr are performed in standing or sitting or even in moving by some orders. The purpose of the Dhikr is to purify

the souls and heart from worldly desires and bring into the awareness of the divine presence in all the aspects of life, be it mental, physical or emotional, in the external and internal realms.

Sufi masters laid emphasize on Dhikr (remembrance of Allah) and considered it obligatory as it grounds the belief and faith of the devotee by focusing the attention on Almighty Allah. In Quran and Islamic teachings one can find that the fundamental command of Allah is to do Dhikr as frequently as possible until constant awareness of the Celestial presence is established. As revealed to the Hazrat Musa by Allah, "Verily I alone am Divine power; there is no deity, so worship me alone and stand fast in prayers so as to remember Me." (Quran 20:14). This revelation as a command for Dhikr has been extended to all creations, though the types of Dhikr are diverse with time and place.

Remembering Allah on daily basis values more in comparison to periodical show of remembrance. Hence Dhikr is not merely a ceremony in fact it is the very object of life. One who remembers Allah finds bliss; one person who forgets finds despair. Through Dhikr the devotee attain the mercy of Allah, purity of soul and beautification of the spirit. Progress and advancement becomes easy and the believer comes near to the Almighty for Allah has said, Remember Me and I shall remember you. (2:152 Quran)

The practices of Dhikr vary among Sufi orders. These varying practices are often draw from the practice of the initiator of a *tariqa*, and may be modified and adapted by different disciples who find themselves at diverse position with their spiritual trails.

Dhikr cannot be taken into the category of ceremony in fact it is the object of life. It is practiced by the repetition or chanting of asma-e-husna (the beautiful names of Allah) either one or all of **certain** religious procedure such as reciting the profession of Iman (faith), there is no divinity by Allah and Prophet Muhammad (SAW) is His Prophet (SAW). The purpose of chanting the divine names is to attain the divine qualities and purifying the minds and soul. Hence Dhikr is a devotional practice wherein the repetition of the names of Allah, Shahadah (testification of faith) and the supplication and prayers derived from the Quran are practiced in a rhythmic manner with consideration to the body's movement and breathing. In Sufi order Dhikr is obligatory and not an optional ritual. They are of the view that all rites and rituals irrespective of prayers and fasting is meant to be remembering Allah. Hence the recitation of Allah's name and the faith testification is further serve as remembrance of the aim towards which each and every practice is heading for.

Among the Sufi order Naqshbandis are known as the silent Sufis as instead of vocal Dhikr they practice in silence. They do not practice sacred dance or music called Sarna. With their spiritual practice they also value of psychological aspect and interpretation of the dreams and lay emphasis on the Suhbat (the close association of the disciple with the master). This Sufi order gain success in central Asia, and extended all through India due to the efforts of Ahmad Sirhindi, well known as Mujaddid (there newer).

Dhikr is cited in various places in the Quran and in several verses, what was meant by word Dhikr is adoration (Tasbeeh), admiration (Tahmeed), praising (Takbeer),

Witnessing (Tahleel) as well as glorifying and call upon acknowledgement on the Prophet (s).

It is ordained in Surah Baqara verse 152: Remember Me I will remember you.

Almighty Allah said in Surah aal-e- Imraan verse 191 " Those who remember Allah while standing, lying and sitting on their sides..."

And in Surah al-Ahzab verse 41, 42 He said "O you who believe! Remember Allah with much remembrance; and praise Him day and night."

Imam Nawawi a great scholar mention in his book that

"Almost all scholars of Islam agreed on the approval and acceptability of *Dhikr* by heart and by tongue, be it adult men and women, children, one who has ablution, and one without ablution; even for the woman in her period. Besides, it is permissible by all scholars that *dhikr* be in the form of tasbeeh, tahmeed, takbeer and praising on the Prophet (s)." (1).

Similarly Ibn Qayyim al Jawziyya stated in his book that

"There is no doubt that the heart corrode as silver and copper corrodes. Through Dhikr it is polished and it becomes a white mirror. Due to sin and Negligence the heart oxidizes. Through two processes it can be polished: Dhikr and repentance. If someone's heart is corrode, it will reflect the upside down images, such as he will see falsehood as a truth and truth as a falsehood due to rust on the heart it will become darkened and the images of reality and truth never appear in the darkness. Dhikr of Allah is the best option to polish the heart." (2)

The dhikr in elaborated form is called sama or in other words spiritual recitation which includes, chanting, singing, in some cases dance, instrumental music and rhythmic breathing. The eventual objective of

which is to attain the state of trance and ecstasy. This state of ecstasy and trance marks the zenith of dhikr ceremony that can be lasted for several hours.

Ibn 'Ataillah as-Sakandari said,

"With dhikr one leaves behind imprudence and forgetfulness and keeps one's heart in attendance with Allah Almighty the glorious and sublime. The best way to advance His Presence is recitation of the name of Allah by tongue or by heart, or simply by recitation of His any attributes. **[Miftah al-Falah, p. 4] (3)**

Abul Qasim al-Qushayri said,

" the strongest pillar in the way of Almighty Allah is dikhr. None can attain the divine presence except by enduring to recite dikhr."

[Risalat al-Qushayriyya] (4)

There are several different Sufi paths and each one of them uses different meditation techniques. Such as the Naqshbandi order developed the practice by using the love energy to go beyond the mind since love is the most powerful energy in creation and the essence of the divine spirit. Love is considered to be faster than mind as it has the ability to overcome the mind. This can be best explained in the dimension of the self when we experience the falling in love where we do not think rationally or clearly.

Sarna (Mystical session of Music and poetry) was initiated in mid 9th century in Baghdad with the intention to attain the ecstatic experience. The famous whirling dervishes are the followers of the Mevlevi order of the Turkish Sufis, based on the famous mystic Rumi's teachings following which the first of the main four Sufi orders of the sub continent "Chishtiya" adopted the whirling dance called dhamaal in traditional culture. Whirling or rotating on axis is an old dance as around the globe every discipline of dance has whirling and rotating techniques. According to Rumi it is a phenomenon where one find or explore the centre within oneself which was still and silent and that stillness of the soul becomes a bridge to one's higher consciousness resulted in enlightenment and liberation of oneself.

Chishtiya order in the South and Southeast Asia introduces the Qawwali. This is the music which is associated with Sarna. For Qawwali there are three requirements for Sarna (5)

- 1) Place (makan) 2) Time (zaman) and last 3) companions (ikhwan). Makan is the place where Qawwali is arranged to be performed. The place is supposed

to be in isolation where people have no regular access to passes by. Zaman means that the prescribed time should be allocated for performing Qawwali when there are no other obligations or duty i.e. prayer time or other work which could interfere. Hence with all peace of mind it should be attended. Ikhwan means the people of like minded who are in search of Allah's love and truth should be assembled which is called mehfil. The Qawwali performers or singers are included in the requirement. By twelfth century Sarna assumed the vital role among Chishti devotional practice. Many critics surfaced against the practice of musical performance and even considered it blasphemous but Chishti sheiks vigorously defended the practice and considered Sarna as an integral part of Sufi devotion. They argue that if performed under the proper condition it is within the dictates of normative Islamic laws. (6)

Gradually, Sufi musical traditions achieved wide recognition and also a majestic patronage. However for spiritual motivation the use of music remained a feature of the Chishti order.

Conclusion

In conclusion it is evident that the practice of contemporary Sufi orders and sub orders differ but almost every order has adopted and included the recitation of the name of Allah and certain verses from the **Quran** as a way to conquer the lower self, enable the soul to reach the higher self passing through the different stages to seek the pleasure of the beloved, the divine.

Sufism marks the significant contributions to the propagation of Islam. For the development of certain characteristics of Islam such as calligraphy and literature, Sufism had made considerable contributions. Although several conservative Muslims do not agree with many popular Sufi practices such as saint worshiping, Ziarat of the tombs etc and consider it an amalgamation of non-Islamic customs. Sufi ethics has played a vital role in the uplift of the society at large. Festivals such as Urs (death anniversary) celebrated in communities with Sufi lodges apt to focus around the lodge itself, which provides the pilgrims a site of gathering and interaction.

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