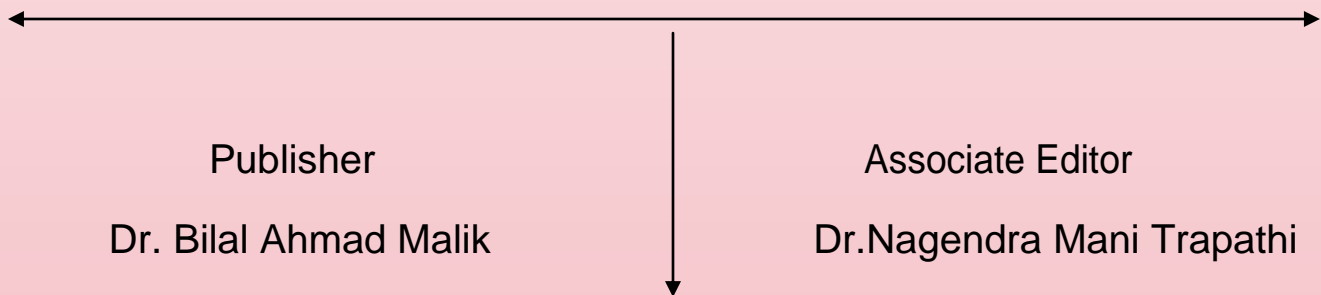


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## NAIRJC JOURNAL PUBLICATION

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ISSN NO: 2454 - 2326

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## THE CONTINUITY OF ISLAMIC TRADITION AND ESSENCE OF SUFISM THROUGH AGES

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When the city–state of Rome transformed itself into a world –empire by absorbing within its orbit the entire Mediterranean world, the political institutions and legal ideas of the eternal city spread to all the countries ruled by or allied with it. In the same way, the political system and legal ideas of the Anglo-Saxons spread in varying degrees to all the countries dominated by them. The case of Islam was similar in many respects. The establishment of Muslim rule in different countries of Asia, Africa and Europe was followed by the introduction of Islamic political, legal and military systems in those portions of the globe. This analogy between Islam on the one hand and Rome and England on the other, however, should not be pushed too far. Rome established a centralized system of government, in all parts of her vast empire the will of the senate, and, later on, of the Emperor, was supreme. England has always allowed varying degrees of local autonomy to the territories colonized by her adventurous sons, for in local autonomy lies the peculiar strength of her institutions; even in conquered territories the ‘man on the spot’ enjoyed comparative freedom from interference by the ‘Home’ Government. On the whole, however, even until a very recent period she exercised from London a general control over the more important political issues arising within her empire. In the case of Islam, on the other hand, this type of centralization, though often recognized in theory, was seldom, if ever, realized in practice. The theory that the entire Islamic world was under the direct religious and political authority of the khalifa persisted up to the last, in spite of the fact that the declining power of the Abbasids and the rise of the so-called ‘Minor Dynasties’ constituted unmistakable evidence of the steadily growing spirit of disruption. The crumbling political structure was covering the east with the magnificent ruins, and the day was not far off when imposing monuments would be raised by new converts out of these apparently decaying materials. But this lack of centralized administrative control did not prevent Islamic political and legal theories and practices from taking root in the countries subordinated to the politically triumphant banner of the prophet’s religion. All Islamic states, whether in Asia, in Africa, or in Europe, whether ruled by Arabs, Persian and Turks, were based on the same pattern; everywhere it was the spirit of the Quran that ruled. On the whole, however, it is justified that the political structure of an Islamic state in any part of the world can be best understood when it is interpreted with reference to the early history and political theories of Islam.

The Islamic state in India was an autonomous and distinct part of the vast world over which the spirit of the Prophet ruled. The Arab state of Sind and the Turkish state of Delhi were based on the same pattern so far as their ideals and methods of government were concerned, but there was an important difference between the two. When Muizz-Ud-din Muhammad Ibn Sam carried the banner of Islam into the heart of India and finally established it as the dominant political power in the land of the Hindus, a new age was ushered in the history of the country. The accession of Qutub-Uddin Aibak as the independent sultan of Delhi on his master's assassination in 1206 A.D. has been conventionally regarded as the starting point of the so-called Muslim period of Indian history. The importance of that year lies in the fact that it witnessed the establishment of an independent Islamic state in the soil of India. The Arab rulers of Sind were, practically at first and nominally afterwards, merely provincial governors under the khalifas who ruled over the entire Islamic world. Mahmud of Ghazni formally recognized the authority of the Yamani dynasty really lay outside the borders of India. But the first Slave sultan of Delhi ruled exclusively as an Indian prince without any allegiance or interest outside India.

The Turkish Sultanate of Delhi was, therefore, for all practical purpose, an independent political structure. It would be a mistake, however, to think that it had nothing to do with the world of Islam outside India. The difference in their attitude towards Islamic theology and law was, however, one of degree, not of kind. No Sultan of Delhi was prepared to initiate a politico-religious revolution or to divorce religion from secular affairs. The reason are not far to seek. To the medieval man innovations inconsistent with dogmas enunciated by scriptures and preached by holy men were anathema. In this respect the traditions and teachings of Islam were specially antipathetic to heresy. Again, the necessity of consolidating their co-religionists combined with traditions and personal conviction in urging upon the Muslim rulers of India the desirability of accepting the principles of Islamic law as the basis of the state which they created and maintained by military force. It was not possible for them to do anything else or to take a leap into the dark, for they lived in an age which was fanatically orthodox. Streams of Arabian, Africans, Persians and Turks poured into India after she had been forced to enter into the orbit of the Islamic world. Learned divines came to expound the law, to guide the rulers along the path laid down for all ages by the prophet, and to call the faithful to arms against the heretics.<sup>1</sup>

There are sayings that 'Sufism today is a name without a reality that once a reality without a name' by noted Sufi Abul-Hasan Bushanji and 'Sufism is an essence, a truth; there is no form, no ritual, no custom in it; it is pure essence'- embarked by Ibn al-Jalla. These two sayings go together. Sufism was a reality that has now become a form, has now become a name that is no longer a reality. True Sufism is always a reality that eludes form. It can



never be fully embodied in form and takes on all manners of forms innumerable forms for its expression and manifestation. And its whole essence remains secret, hidden, beyond form. The Sufis have always recognized the process whereby a hidden secret is institutionalized, co modified and known to the world as a form while the Sufis themselves, in secret, concealed its essence and carried on. This has happened over the generations. Time after time a transmission has been passed down from person to person from heart to heart without intermediary, always from heart to heart. <sup>2</sup>

Sufism is a reform movement within Islam which laid emphasis on toleration, free thought and liberal ideas. The Sufis believed in the equality of all human beings, whether Muslims, Hindus or the followers of any other creed. According to them all religions were '*the manifestation of the desire to the known truth*'. The spirit underlying all the religions was one and the same, though they might have different forms. So the Sufis were in favor of toleration and did not preach the persecution of other people only because of their different religions. They were against orthodoxy of any kind and regard free thought as the primary condition to spiritual advancement. In a way Sufism was very much like the Vedantic philosophy<sup>3</sup>. Besides Sufism is the strict emulation of the way of Muhammad, through which the hearts connection to the divine is strengthened<sup>4</sup>. In fact this liberal movement among the Muslims started in Persia, The house of Shias, where some religious men and holy saints arrived at the conclusion that there were no fundamental difference between the Shias and the Sunnis, and likewise between Islam and other religions. They felt that different religions were like different ways which reach the same goal, i.e. the attainment of god's favor. They preached the brotherhood of man and emphasized on the principle of toleration and taught people to live like good neighbors. Sometime it (Sufism) stands as a science whose objective is the reparation of the heart and turning it away from all else but god<sup>5</sup>. Slowly and slowly these Sufis began to pour in India where they were greatly honored because here in India reformers of the Bhakti movement were already busy preaching somewhat similar principles to the people of India.

The principles of Sufism resemble very much with those of the Bhakti Cult and it appears as if the Vedantic philosophy had greatly affected it. God is one and all powerful, and all men are His children. If anyone wants to get the love and blessings of god he should try to love mankind. An English poet has similarly remarked, *to love god is to love mankind*. True faith depends upon right living. Only good actions lead to good results and so one should try to do good acts rather than run after rituals and useless religious ceremonies. All religions are inherently good because they all aim at the attainment of god's love. Different religions are only the different manifestations of the desire to know the truth. All men are equal and all distinctions based on caste, color and



Creed are to be condemned. Like the Vedantic philosophy Sufism laid emphasis on the principle that individual souls are manifestations of the supreme soul in which they are finally immersed. Free way of thinking is a great blessing and is very necessary for the spiritual advancement.

Sufism, however, played a great part in promoting the feeling of toleration among the Muslims. It greatly encouraged the feeling of Hindu-Muslim unity. It led to the popularity of the Bhakti movement, because many principles of Sufism were similar to those of the Bhakti cult. It had a great liberalizing effect on the state policy of many Indian rulers<sup>6</sup>. It is absolutely incumbent to be a Muslim to be a true Sufi because Sufism methods are inoperative without Muslim affiliation<sup>7</sup>. It was under the influence of Sufism that many Indian rulers like Sher Shah Suri and Akbar gave up much of their orthodoxy and began to treat all their subjects alike. The Hindus began to venerate the Muslim saints and Muslim on their part began to show respect to the Hindu gods<sup>8</sup>.

Sufism was born intellectually in Arabia, devotionally reared in Persia and spiritually completed in India. The impact of Muslim Sufis in the Indian society in Hindus as well as in Muslims,- and the importance of their tolerant behavior and the fine impression of their deeds and practices, helped Hindus and Muslims a lot to live in peace and harmony. On the other hand familiarization of Muslims Sufis with the spirituality and deep philosophical thoughts of Indian thinkers found in Sanskrit further enriched their wisdom.

India, known as a place where various cultures and religions live in harmony along with one another, has been the best example of harmonious living. The best was to believing in love for bringing harmony and affection amongst various beliefs and religions. The Sufis and Indian spiritual men, believing in love, opened the doors of peace and harmony everywhere. They embarked upon meditation and preaching, and continued doing so till the end of their lives.<sup>9</sup>

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