CHAPTER I

SUFIISM: THE QURANIC PERSPECTIVE
A scholar in Islamic history is seldom in ambiguity when faced with the question of discerning the source of authority in Islam. He is left with little, or precisely no, choice but to go back to those set of revelations which started on a certain night (which later came to be denoted as *Laylat al-Qadr* — The Night of Power) in the month of Ramadan in 610 A.D. in a cave at Mount Hira in the outskirts of Mecca. This was to continue, intermittently though, for the next two decades thereby providing the ‘manual’ to the followers of the youngest, and perhaps the most talked about, faith—Islam.\(^1\)

In its final form these words of God came to be known as Al Quran, meaning ‘the reading’.\(^2\) God revealed Himself in a book, which in the course of time laid the basis for all authority—moral, religious and political in Islam.

Scholars on Islamic mysticism, more popularly Sufism, have been dexterous in their attempts at tracing the origins of the institution in the works of other like minded scholars, and at best in works of the famous mystics of Islam. In the same path, efforts were also made towards studying the varying influences of cultures, more prominently Hellenistic, on the origins and development of Sufism. But in an attempt to lay too much emphasis on external circumstances, as crucial for the development of Sufi doctrines, the inherent ideas lying embedded in the sacred texts of Islam have been put to much neglect. Although it cannot be argued, beyond doubt, that Islamic mysticism was not influenced by other mystic cultures like Hellenism, Byzantium, Persian and Indian among else, but in midst of all these influences the doctrine of the Islamic faith was held high.

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\(^1\) Islam is derived from the root word, ‘*slm*’ and means submission to the Will and Guidance of the Creator. The Quran was revealed at intervals of varying length, the first being in 610 A.D followed by the second two years later in 612 A.D.

\(^2\) Marmaduke Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Quran*, World Islamic Publications, Delhi, 1979, p. 5. The first revelation that Muhammad (SAW) received was, ‘Read’. However Muhammad (SAW) having no formal education was unable to do so. Thus the meaning of the Quran as ‘Reading’, essentially implies the effort at reading by a man ‘who knew not how to read.’
The Mystic/Sufi and the Holy Quran

Mystics of Islam admitted beyond any semblance of doubt the authority of the Holy Quran and the traditions of the Prophet of Islam (SAW), in their search for the eternal truth. The duties and obligations laid down in the Holy texts of Islam cannot be abandoned under any circumstances since they provided the pathway towards attaining that highest stage of spiritual salvation. And no mystical stage is too high so as to rise above the prescriptions of religion that spell out in unambiguous terms the tenets of Islam, as revealed by the words of God. Thus the basic principles of their faith were never compromised, which in turn withheld them from being an aimless wanderer in the blind lanes of fanaticism. With every passing stage in their spiritual journey, the Sufis strived more arduously for that Divine bliss- which in turn sustained their great fear for God.\(^3\) As the famous Baghdadi Sufi, al Junayd aptly remarked, ‘Our system of doctrine is firmly bound up with the dogmas of Faith, the Quran and the Traditions.’\(^4\) A similar pronouncement is to be found in the words of the Suhrawardi master Shaykh Shihabuddin Suhrawrdi, who argued that the roots of Sufism are to be located in the verses of the Holy Quran, not in the esoteric sense, but more precisely in the spiritual sense. In the absence of the word ‘Sufi’ in the Quran, the shaykh applied the Quranic term \textit{Al Rashikun fi al-Ilm} (Those Firmly Rooted in Knowledge) to denote those individuals who are in recipients of the Divine knowledge of Truth, one that has descended from the legacy of the prophets and cannot be derived from simple material sources.\(^5\)

Sufis consider the Quran as something more than a revealed text which needs to be interiorised for spiritual benefits. They successfully

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applied the essence of this book to various walks of life and made those around them realise the worth of it through simple exercises such as daily recitation. The virtues of the Book are not preserved for those with high spiritual acumen, but are equally accessible to the common masses who respect its worth from the depths of their hearts. In order to elaborate on the argument we take into account the words of one of south Asia's most revered saint- Shaikh Nizamuddin Awliya, and explore his emotions on this Holy text, which among other things is so vividly portrayed in his mafzurat collection- the Fawaid ul Fuad.

**Quran in the Eyes of the Chishtia Mystics**

Shaikh Nizamuddin Awliya once stated that the Holy Quran comprises of four things: Ibadat (Obedience), Isharat (Allusion), Lataif (Elegance) and Haqaiq (Truth). Of these Ibadat is for the common masses, Isharat is for the select (khvass), Lataif is for the friends of God (Awliya) and Haqaiq is for the Prophets (Anbiya).⁶ Although the Holy Quran is meant for the entire mankind, yet the inner qualities of the revealed text are meant for those who have reached a specific station in the spiritual hierarchy. However, Sufis apply the injunctions of the Quran both exoterically in the form of law and esoterically in the form of purification of self. The latter achieved through acts like prayer (salaat), fasting (sawn) and pilgrimage (hajj) together with the recitation of the Quran, which is equally important. The recitation of the Quran is the single most defining exercise in the assembly of zikr. Irrespective of the debate on the permissibility of reciting the Quran with, or without, tune,⁷ the act of recitation remains significant in interiorising the essence of the text. This is attested by the famous Baghdad Sufi, Hasan

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⁶ Mir Khud, Siyarat ul-Awlia, Muhibb i-Hind, Delhi, 1881, p. 447.
Basri who advised his disciples to ‘Seek pleasure in three things: ritual prayer, remembrance of God’s name and the recitation of the Quran.’

Listening to the recitation of the Quran also carried much spiritual value for the listener, so that the Jamaat Khana of Baba Fariduddin Ganj i-Shakr at Ajodhan hummed with the voices of disciples reciting the Holy Quran, not only for their own spiritual well-being but also for the numerous visitors who thronged at the Jamaat Khana regularly. This was carried forward by Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya at Ghiyaspur, although many of his disciples also visited the mosque to take part and listen to the recitations of the maulana, so that they may be rewarded spiritually. Such a tradition was not new to south Asian Sufism is well illustrated by the fact that at the khanqah of the famous Iranian mystic Abu Said Abul Khair (d. 1049), disciples were instructed by the master shaykh to engage in the practice of recitation of the Quran in the early hours of morning so that the day begun with a remembrance of God and their attention did not get distracted from spiritual affairs through idle talk.

Hazrat Nizamuddin repeatedly emphasised on the spiritual rewards of reciting the Quran (tilawat) and memorising it (hifz). It was incumbent on any individual reciting the Holy Quran to fully comprehend the meanings of the verses he was reading. Then the meanings of the verses read should be absorbed within the heart of the reciter, and for this to take place the heart of the reciter should be engrossed in the thoughts of the Divine Truth. The magnificence and beneficence of God received as a result of such an exercise must be instilled within the heart of the reciter. Thus it is

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12 S.A, p. 447.
13 FF, pp. 76-77
imperative for the reciter, or the mystic to condition his heart in the way of the Truth, and only then can he benefit from the verses recited from the Holy Book. The shaykh further stated that the qualities of reciting the Holy Book is such that an individual pursuing the exercise with full sincerity will find himself in the Path of Truth (haqq).\(^\text{14}\)

Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya considered the rewards associated with the Book to be so numerous that one can get Divinely blessed even by simply looking at the pages of the Holy revelation.\(^\text{15}\) Baba Farid insisted that any individual attempting to be a 
\textit{Hafiz} i-Quran should begin by memorising \textit{Surah i-Yusuf}.\(^\text{16}\) The shaykh recommended that a novice should learn recitation from a professional reader of the Quran, and should recite before him beginning with the \textit{Surah i-Yusuf}, since the spiritual worth of this verse is such that God would favour the individual with the whole of Quran committed to memory.\(^\text{17}\)

Reciting the Quran was considered a sign of piety for an individual. Nizamuddin Awliya recounted an incident where in the vicinity of Sarsi a caravan was attacked by robbers who killed all the travellers. Among them was a pious \textit{danishmand} who died in the state of reciting the Quran. On enquiry the saint came to know that the slain was Maulana Kaithali, a man

\(^{14}\) Ibid.
\(^{15}\) Ibid. p. 168.
\(^{16}\) The twelfth chapter of the Holy Quran, \textit{Surah i-Yusuf} recapitulates the story of Joseph, the youngest (but one) and favorite of the twelve sons of Prophet Jacob. In the old age of Jacob the jealousy of his elder sons gets the better of Joseph who is thrown into a well only to be recovered by a caravan of slave traders. He is sold for a miserable little price to the great Egyptian court dignitary, Asis. Joseph's purity and chastity lands him in the prisons, from where he is released his interpretation of a dream wins the King's favor. He is appointed \textit{wazir} when his brothers come to Egypt driven by the hardships of famine. Joseph treats them kindly and detains his youngest full brother Benjamin, asking his elder brothers to bring Jacob and the whole family from Canaan to Egypt. Jacob comes, and after the truth is revealed settles in Egypt with his sons. This story is a highly spiritual sermon, portraying the vicissitudes of life, the enduring nature of virtue and the marvelous unfolding of God's eternal purpose. It is due to this message of the story that it has found much favor among mystics/Sufis who look to imbibe its valuable lessons. Its exposition with regard to God's grace and mercy to people, who go with Him in their daily affairs and place complete faith in His actions (\textit{tawakkul}), is a lesson for every believer. The Sufis surrendering their self to the will of the Almighty consider this chapter to be a lesson, a realisation of which only strengthens their spiritual conviction. 
\(^{17}\) FF, p. 168.
of great spiritual knowledge and 'one of those who was in direct communion with the Divine.'\textsuperscript{18} Shaykh Nizamuddin also stated that the reciter at the time of reciting the Holy Quran should inculcate a feeling of intense submission and humility within his heart, and at the same time consider himself fortunate for being able to read and understand the words of the Almighty.\textsuperscript{19} If such a feeling does not arise in the heart of the reciter then he should imagine that at the time of recitation he is before God, and in return for his pious exercise, the Almighty will bless him accordingly.\textsuperscript{20} A simple oral conformation to the words of God is not enough to derive benefits from such a highly spiritual exercise. Rather the reciter should recognise the qualities of the practice from within his heart, and accordingly submit to the magnificence of the Almighty, to derive maximum blessings from the Unseen.

It is recorded in the traditions that Prophet Muhammad (SAW) once remarked that if an individual inspite of all his pious intentions cannot become a \textit{Haft\textsuperscript{i}-Quran}, during his lifetime, but engages in virtuous deeds in his lifetime will be rewarded accordingly. After his death when he is lowered into his grave, an angel, from the heaven, will come to him with a kind of orange. The fragrance from the orange will preserve the Entire Quran in his heart, and as a result on the Day of Judgment he will be reinstated as a \textit{Haft\textsuperscript{i}-Ouratt}.\textsuperscript{21}

In the month of Ramadan, it is mandatory for every practicing Muslim to complete a recitation of the Quran in course of the \textit{tarawih} prayers.\textsuperscript{22} But the virtuous choose to exert themselves more, through multiple recitations of the Holy book. The Shaikh recalls that Imam Abu

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[Ibid.] pp. 169-73
\item[S.A.] p. 447.
\item[FT] p. 169.
\item[S.A.] p. 450.
\item[22] A prayer offered in congregation after the night prayer during the month of Ramadan.
\end{enumerate}
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Hanifah completed a recitation of the whole Quran in taramh in the thirty nights of the Holy month of Ramadan. In addition to it he also recited the full Quran during the day and also in the night. Thus in order to heighten his spiritual abilities Abu Hanifah recited the whole Quran sixty one times in the Holy month of Ramadan.24 His recitation of the Quran was not limited to the month of Ramadan only, but he regularly recited prodigious amounts of the Quran, and immersed himself in prayer and worship. It is to be noted that Abu Hanifah memorised the Quran and studied the art of Quranic recitation (qira'at) with the famous Quran reader ‘Asim ibn Bahdala, whose style of recitation still remains one of the most emulated ones.25

Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya concurred with his illustrious disciple, Amir Hasan ala-Sanjari that at the time of recitation it may be such that the reciter may be thinking of something else other than the Holy text. At that moment it is better that the reciter choose a verse to recite that reflects that condition of his heart and his thoughts. So that he does not get distracted from the exercise of recitation.26

Recitation of the Quran does not express mere lip service to the words of the Holy text; rather it involves the heart and mind of the reader. So that while observing proper manners (adab) the Quran should be recited in slow and measured rhythmic tones (tartil). But in course of recitation if a particular verse caught the emotion of the reader and filled his heart with delight, then it was to be repeated again and again (tardid) so that his heart was spiritually leavened and comforted.27 The second method should be

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24 FF, p. 262.
26 §4, p. 448.
27 FF, p. 177.
such that it does not give rise to emotions of hypocrisy and shamefulness.28

These two methods were elaborated, by the saint, in which the Quran was to be recited. If the recitation of the Quran does not give rise to proper emotions in the heart of the reciter then it should be repeated from the beginning. The shaykh cited a tradition from the Prophet of Islam, where the latter once started reciting the Holy Book with the words Bismillah ar-Rahman ar-Rahim, but unfortunately it did not lead to the rise of compassion in the heart, so that he decided to start it all over again from the beginning.29

It was suggested by Shaykh Nizamuddin that a person should try and finish the Quran within three days. If he is unsuccessful then he should try and finish it by a week. In the most extreme of situations, an individual should not take more than a week to finish reciting the entire Quran. Any person, who succeeds in completing the Quran within a day, does it a bit fast; but inspite of that he is not deprived from the benefices of the Almighty.30 But it is better to read the Quran with ease, rather than hurry through the verses, since by this process one spends longer time in the act of recitation. The shaykh further noted that even if a person reads only the verses of prayer from the Quran, then also he will be blessed from the Unseen, provided he keeps his heart clean and pure from all thoughts concerning the carnal self (nafs).31

However the style of recitation varied from person to person. The most eloquent and perfect of which could move a person's heart to an extent so as to turn him to tears. Maulana Shariuddin was one such person who took great care to recite the Quran with utmost perfection so that each letter was pronounced with the correct intonation. Shaykh Nizamuddin further said that he knew of a danishmand in Sunam, known as Maulana Daulatyar who recited the Quran so well and in such a manner that it was

28 S.A., p. 448.
29 FF, p. 177.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
impossible for others to emulate him.\textsuperscript{32} Thereafter the Shaikh recalled that Baba Fariduddin recited Quran with the utmost passion and eloquence, and he pronounced dwad (ض) in a manner that it could not be imitated.\textsuperscript{33}

Elaborating on the manners of recitation Shaykh Nizamuddin emphasised that, firstly, while reciting the Quran one should have one's heart fixed on the person of God. Secondly, if the earlier was not possible then one should feel the meaning of the verses recited, and its affect on the heart of the individual. Thirdly, if even this was not possible then one's heart should be filled with the majesty and glory of God. It was further explained that the latter concerned the 'attributes' of the Almighty rather then His 'person', which was emphasised in the first place. Fourthly, one should feel overwhelmed with a feeling of modesty and penance that one was not worthy of the spiritual wealth the individual derived from the recitation of the Quran. And fifthly, one should always keep it in mind that the rewards of reciting the Quran comes directly from God, bestowed on the person who undertakes the exercise. During such an intense devotional practice it was also advised that the heart and mind of the believer be bereft of all possible worldly matters, which could then act as distractions to the cause.\textsuperscript{34}

The spiritual happiness an individual derives from the recitation of the Quran are multiple, and completely Divine. It is illumination (\textit{anwar}) or spiritual state (\textit{abwah}) or sublime impressions (\textit{assar}). These descend on the soul, heart and limbs respectively from the world of God's dominion, the world of Angel's and the world of Almightiness. Firstly, the soul is illumined from the world of God's dominion, when he is deeply absorbed in reciting the Quran. Secondly, whatever happens in the heart in the form of reflections descend from the world of Almightiness. Thirdly, the outward emotions exhibited in the form of weeping and crying together with any

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., p. 313.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., pp. 313-14
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., p. 178.
other form of physical agitation (\textit{athar}), descend on the physical being of the reader from the world of the Angel’s.\textsuperscript{35}

Shaykh Nizamuddin stated that it was better if one can understand the meaning of the verses while reciting from the Holy Quran, then he will be in a position to relate them to the feelings that arise in his heart during this exercise. He further narrated that once Imam Hamid bin-Janbal saw God one thousand times in his dreams. He asked God about the most virtuous act through which one can achieve closeness to Him, and benefit from His blessings. The reply came in the act of reciting the Holy Quran. When Imam Hamid bin-Janbal whether it is better to recite with understanding or without it, the reply came that whatever way an individual recites the words of the Almighty, he will never be bereft from the benefices of the Lord.\textsuperscript{36}

Later Sufis of the Chishtia order like the Deccani master Khwaja Gesudaraz stated that together with prayers and fasting considered as obligatory practices for every Muslim, the recitation of the Holy Quran drew man closer towards God. He further elaborated on his spiritual gains that ‘triumph in my affair’ (\textit{fath-i kar-i man}) came mostly from the recitation (\textit{tilawat}) of the Quran and \textit{sama}.\textsuperscript{37} During his discipleship under the Chishtia master of Delhi, Shaykh Nasiruddin Mahmud Chirag i-Dehli, Gesudaraz used to spend time from midday till \textit{Asr} prayers everyday reciting the Holy Quran.\textsuperscript{38}

Going by the popular dictum of the theologians and the \textit{ulama}, it would be fallacious to argue that Chishtia saints used the Quran only to interpret, or misinterpret, spiritual affairs. The above discussion is ample proof of the weakness of the argument. Even at a time when the Chishtia order was forced to shift its focus to the Deccan, under enforcements from

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 122.
\textsuperscript{36} SA, p. 449.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., pp. 64-65.
the Tughluq regime, leading saints of that order in the Deccan like Khwaja Bandanawaz Gesudaraz trained themselves in the sciences of the Quran, basing on the works of prominent scholars like Mahmud al-Samakshari (d. 1144 A.D.) whose commentary on the Quran named Tafsir al-Kashshaf, was discussed at length by the Chishtia master in a work titled Hawashi al-Kashshaf. Gesudaraz wrote another commentary on the Quran around 1397 A.D., but had to leave it incomplete due to the exodus to Deogir. Prior to this he the shaykh had composed another exegesis of the Quran, titled Tafsir-i-Muktaqat sometime between 1335-80 A.D. This was written from the mystical perspective and was taught by Gesudaraz himself to his disciples at the Gulbarga khanaqah. Not only were Chishtia mystics adept in their training in the sciences of the Quran, but at the same time they took great care to incorporate the teachings of the Holy Book into other works composed by them. In this vein Gesudaraz wrote Asmar ul-Asrar, his most important creation on mysticism, drawing inspiration from the Holy Quran. He divided the work into 114 chapters in accordance to the number of suras in the Quran. Each chapter dealt with mystical interpretation of the Quranic verses, although there are many areas which the Chishtia master chose to keep secret from his disciples and readers.

The genre of conversational treatises (malfuzat) popularised by the saints of the Chishtia order and their disciples in south Asia also showed the importance of the Quran in the composition of such texts. A well known malfuzat of Shaykh Burhanuddin Gharib (d. 1337 A.D.), the illustrious deputy (khalifa) of Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya, was compiled by Hammaduddin Kashani (d. 1360 A.D.), entitled Ahsan ul-Aqwal (The Best of Sayings). It is a norm with mystical texts, in this case of south Asia to begin with a saying from the pages of the Holy Quran, together with references to

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40 SM, pp. 95, 114.
the major exegesis of the Quran scattered within the book. In addition to this the title of the book is drawn from two passages of the Quran that stress on both hearing and following good advice.\textsuperscript{42} The two passages are as follows – firstly, "Those who listen to the Word and follow the best (meaning) in it: Those are the ones whom God has guided, and those are the ones endued with understanding."\textsuperscript{43} In this verse guidance is ensured to those who listen reverently and understand the meaning and essence of the words of God. They are the ones who are equipped with the guidance of the Almighty, and are endowed to understand the wonders and secrets of God's creation. The second verse, "Who is better in speech than one who calls (men) to God, works righteousness, and says, 'I am of those who bow in Islam.'" Considered by many as a perfect description of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW), this verse characterises him as one who ‘calls’ to the Truth of God, showing that his thoughts are not centred on himself only; practices ‘righteousness’ in all his deeds as a proof of coherence between his preaching and conduct, and completely ‘bows’ to the will of God Almighty, embodying the creed of Islam – submission to Allah.\textsuperscript{44} Thus the above clearly illustrates the centrality of the teachings and essence of the Holy Quran within the corpus of mystical literature.

It is interesting to note that through a careful perusal of the Divine words of the Almighty, Sufis also honoured the Prophetic tradition, situating their belief on the pretext of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) being the manifestation (\textit{maq\textbar}) of God's essence. In the Quran, God clearly instructs 'whom so ever obeys the Prophet, obeys God.'\textsuperscript{45} Thus it can be argued apart from tracing their spiritual genealogy to Prophet Muhammad (SAW), Sufis also considered him their gateway to Divine beneficence and blessing. It was

\textsuperscript{43} Al Quran 39:18
\textsuperscript{44} Yusuf Ali, \textit{The Holy Quran}, p. 1296.
\textsuperscript{45} Al Quran 4:80
this unique relationship that existed between the Perfect Man (*Insan i-Kamil*) and the Divine essence of God that was eloquently expressed in the verses of the leading disciple – Amir Khusrau – of the north Indian Chishtia master Shaykh Nizamuddin

No one gets anything without your benefaction;

Even God gives nothing without your pleasure.\(^{46}\)

It is through this Quranic injunction that mystics consider the Prophet a unique expression of God’s magnificence, without whose pleasure it is impossible to invoke the blessings of the Almighty.

Perhaps the most crucial issue that required to be resolved by the Chishtia mystics in accordance to the Holy Quran was that of the permissibility of *sama*. The issue of permissibility being discussed in details in a later chapter, here I would address the issue of relevancy of the Quran in solving the dispute of conducting *sama*, which the *ulama* labelled as being non-Quranic origin and hence blasphemous. With this debate on permissibility of *sama*, according to the tradition of the Quran, gaining momentum in the thirteenth century, both Sufis and legists thought it prudent to fall back on the words of the holy book to justify their position. While there is nothing explicit in the Quran censuring the audition of music and poetry, concerned groups chose to interpret same verses of the text as evidences either in favour or in opposition to the ritual.

Another issue of controversy which developed around this ritual was the use of Quranic verses, alongside poetry, as content of *sama*. Although mystics like al-Hujwiri strongly propounded that ‘the most delightful to the ear is that of the word of God’\(^{47}\), the *ulama* felt that the verses of the revealed Text must never be used in such commonplace exercise, lest people lose awe of the Quran. However a leading mystic of the Suhrawardi order,


Shaykh Shihabuddin Suhrawardi, referred to a Prophetic tradition where the Prophet instructed Mimshad Dinawari (d. 912 A.D.) to listen to poetry and music, accompanied by verses from the Holy Quran at the beginning and at the end. Following this tradition the Chishtia master of Deccan, Khwaja Gesudaraz preferred the recitation of the Holy Quran before and after sama. In the absence of a reciter only the Surah Fatiha was read in the assembly. Khwaja Gesudaraz argued that the first half of the sama gathering is related to the starting verse, while the later part of sama is related to the end verse. In this way the entire exercise of audition got translated into an exercise of Sama ul-Quran.

Seeking legitimacy from the pages of the Holy Quran, Chishtia mystics like Shaykh Fariduddin Ganj i-Shakar argued that the source of ecstasy in sama is the primordial covenant between God and Man, when the former asked, ‘Am I not your Lord? (Who cherishes and sustains you)’. They answered ‘Yes! We do testify! (This). This secret of acknowledging God as the Creator, Cherisher and Sustainer is a ‘secret’ that lies embedded in the heart of every individual, so that whenever they hear the names and attributes of God in sama and zikr they are overcome by an uncontrollable sense of ecstasy. Thus for the Chishtia Sufis the Covenant is the first experience of sama for mystics, and since it is derived from the Holy Quran, then there is no reason why the exercise itself be labelled as contra to the traditions of the Quran.

In spiritual exercises other than the contentious practice of sama the Quran was used to heighten the spiritual experience of the mystic. It is known that Shaykh Abu Said Abul Khair (d. 1049 A.D.) the famous Iranian mystic and poet used to engage in a spiritual practice where he hung himself downwards, legs tied, in a pit. He remained in this position the whole night,

49 SM, p. 132.
50 Al Quran 7:172
reciting the Quran till daybreak when he would haul himself up from the pit
and get ready for the morning prayers.\textsuperscript{51} Thus it was evident that mystics not
only engaged themselves in the outward exercise of recitation through lip
service, but at the same time coupled it with severe penance of the physical
self.

It was only through severe penance that the material attachment to
the world can be shed off, so that the heart was enlivened by the light of the
Almighty. Mystics refer to the Quranic passage, 'So we said: Strike the body
with a piece of the heifer'\textsuperscript{52} to argue that in order to give life to the heart, it
is necessary to kill the body. And for the heart to come to life through the
beneficence of Divine Light (\textit{nur}) it is necessary that the body be starved
through the practice of asceticism to such a degree that it no longer exists as
a reality. Under such circumstances the heart comes forward as the anvil
where the spiritual prowess of a mystic is hammered out.\textsuperscript{53}

While Suhrawardis strictly abhorred the custom of prostrating before
the shaykh, arguing it to be a deification of the shaykh, and placing him at
par with the Divine Almighty, Chishtia mystics, like Shaykh Qutubuddin
Bakhtiyar Kaki and Baba Fariduddin Ganj i-Shakr, defended it on the
ground that it was an act of showing respect to the shaykh and his spiritual
qualities. They quoted the following verse from the Quran as their defence,
'Only those who believe in Our signs, who, when they are recited to them
fall down in adoration and celebrate the praises of their Lord. They are
never puffed up with pride.'\textsuperscript{54} Such an attitude of adoration and respect
towards God was encouraged by the Chishtia saints who advised their
disciple to follow the path of humility and submission to their shaykh and to

\textsuperscript{52} Al Quran 2:73
\textsuperscript{53} Rizvi, \textit{History of Sufism in India}, p. 326.
\textsuperscript{54} Al Quran 32:15
their Lord. But such a proposition was never beyond the tradition of the revealed words of Allah.\textsuperscript{55}

The Quran being an integral part in the daily life of a Muslim reflected the wants and desires of the common individual. But most of the time the common people are incapable of deciphering the Holy book as a panacea for their day to day problems. This is where the mystics step in guiding their disciples and the masses as to how one can draw inspiration and sustenance from the words of God. One day a man came and sought the blessings of Hazrat Nizamuddin as his pecuniary circumstances had become very stringent. The saint advised him to recite \textit{Surah al-Jumua}\textsuperscript{56} (Assembly) each night in order to drive off the stringency of his living. Nizamuddin Awliya recalled that he picked this lesson at the feet of Baba Fariduddin who advised those under hard pecuniary conditions to recite the above verse every Friday night. But surprisingly Baba Farid never utilised the benefits of this verse for his own self. Being the torch bearer of the Chishtiyya ideology, the Ajodhani mystic believed in complete dependence (\textit{tawakkul}) on the Almighty for the daily needs, gratefully accepting the situation God has placed him into. To this Shaykh Nizamuddin added that people who don the garments of Sufis would never strive for good days and affluent circumstances in their lives. For them belief in their Creator was the only source of sustenance.\textsuperscript{57}

Once an individual approached Shaykh Burhanuddin Gharib, the Deputy of Nizamuddin Awliya in the Deccan, and complained about his family problems. The shaykh advised him to read verses, during the evening ritual prayer, from the Holy Quran which started with the word \textit{qul} (say). This was to be followed up by seventy five repetitions of short Arabic

\textsuperscript{55} S.A, p. 241.
\textsuperscript{56} Al Quran 62. This is the sixth \textit{Surah} in the Medina series of surahs. The theme of the \textit{surah} is the need for mutual contact in the Community for worship and understanding the spirit of the message in order that they may be purified and may learn wisdom. See, Yusuf Ali, \textit{The Holy Quran}, pp. 1544-48.
\textsuperscript{57} TT, pp. 157-58.
addresses to God. Such verses the shaykh said were very effective against warding off evil forces and problems.58

Imam Nasiri, author of a commentary on the Holy Quran Tafsir-i-Nasiri emphasised that one who wished to gain safety at times of distress and misfortune should recite Surah Yasin59 forty times; as he himself did when he was buried by his relatives who mistook apoplexy as his death.60 Similarly Shaikh Nizamuddin remarked that reciting of the Surah Fatihah61 is for the fulfillment of desires. And as for the method of recitation he advised that the person when reciting bismillah ar-Rahman ar-Rahim should connect the mim (/logo) of ar-Rahim to the lam (©) of al hamdu lillah, making it read as bismillah ar-Rahman ar-Rahim il hamdu lillah. He should also repeat ar-Rahman ar-Rahim at this point three times. When the surah was completed he should recite amin three times. The Shaikh said that the task would be completed as desired by the grace of Allah.62

The interpretation of Quranic verses, not only helped common masses understand the inner meanings of the Book, thereby realising its immeasurable beneficence in the life of an individual, but at the same time aided rulers in their understanding of the revealed text. One such Sufi was the Kashmiri mystic of the sixteenth century, Shaykh Yaqub (d. 1595 A.D.). A close friend of Shaykh Salim Chishti, this Kashmiri mystic had a deep knowledge of the Quranic interpretations and the mystical meanings attached to it. So that he was held in great esteem by contemporary Mughal rulers like Humayun and Akbar in Delhi. It is interesting to note that while

58 EG, p. 130.
59 Al Quran 36. This early Meccan surah is considered to be the "heart of the book", as it concerns the central figure in the teaching of Islam and the central doctrine of Revelation and the Hereafter. The surah stresses on the importance of Quran being full of wisdom and those unfortunate ones who are unable to benefit from it. See, Yusuf Ali, The Holy Quran, pp. 1168-88.
60 FF, pp. 161.
62 FF, pp. 181-82.
Mughal emperors are not known to have been strict followers of religion, they nonetheless patronised the mystical order with much reverence. So that Shaykh Salim Chishti was supposed to be the patron saint of the ruling house, and Shyakh Yaqub was readily consulted by Mughal rulers on account of Quranic interpretations. While the ulama were kept at a friendly distance the Mughal ruling house depended on the mystical abilities of Sufis for solving critical affairs of the empire. An interesting illustration of which is the effort of Shaykh Yaqub in easing the socio-political situation of Kashmir at a time when Emperor Akbar was intending to annex it to the Mughal empire in 1586 A.D. His contribution was considered crucial in helping the imperial authority gain control over Kashmir, so that he was greatly revered at the Mughal court where he was a frequent visitor.63

Along with problems of daily life the verses of the Holy Quran could be applied to derive relief from physical discomfort or illness. Shaikh Nizamuddin recommended the recitation of Surah al-Buruf to Amir Hasan Dehlawi, compiler of Fawaid ul-Fuad between 1308-1322 A.D., so that he may gain relief from a disease caused by guinea worm. He hoped that a regular recitation of the verse would serve as a preventive measure against the disease. The sheikh also recommended that Surah al-Asfs be recited ten times during the afternoon prayer so that individuals remained safe from being prey of diseases.66

While verses of the Holy Quran carries in it certain distinct mystical qualities worthy of routine application, traditions testify that one could also


64 Al Quran 85. One of the earlier Meccan surahs it deals with the persecution of God’s votaries. God watches the enemies of truth and will deal with them as He had dealt in the past. See, Yusuf Ali, The Holy Quran, pp. 1713-17.

65 Al Quran 103. This early Meccan surah bears testimony to the fact that time is always in favor of those who have hold on to their faith, lived clean and pure lives and have borne all things with patience and constancy. Time bears witness that nothing remains in this world but Faith and Good Deeds, and the essence of Truth. For these are the teaching of Patience and Constancy. See, Yusuf Ali, The Holy Quran, pp. 1782-83.

66 FF, pp. 310-11.
take omens from the Quran. If one intended that way then one should open the book with the right hand only, keeping the left hand aside.\footnote{Ibid., p. 180.} Once a leading mystic Shaikh Badruddin Ghaznavi, on his way from Ghazna decided to settle in Lahore, a bustling city of that age. At the time of leaving Lahore his indecision of returning to Ghazna, to his ancestral land and family members and moving on to Delhi to his son-in-law, led him to take omen from the Quran. Firstly when he looked up the book with the intention of going back to Ghazna, he came across a verse that warned of impending punishment. Then with the idea of proceeding to Delhi, he opened the book only to find a verse concerning the Paradise with its cool streams and other pleasures. Therefore going against his yearning for family and dear ones, he proceeded towards Delhi to meet his son-in-law. He met his son-in-law who heartily greeted the Shaikh and took him to his house, with much care and hospitality. In the meantime he received news from Ghazna that the Mongols had overrun the land and all his family together with relatives had been put to death.\footnote{Ibid.}

Shaikh Nizamuddin prophesied the greatness of his disciple (\textit{khilafah}) Shaykh Burhanuddin Gharib, by taking example of a verse from the Quran. At a time when Muhammad bin Tughluq was forcing the entire population of Delhi to migrate to the new city of Deogir in the Deccan, Shaykh Nizamuddin entrusted his favourite disciple with the vital responsibility of moving with the population to Deogir, to ensure their safety and well being. At a time of departure he handed over the successorship (\textit{khilafatnama}) to Shaykh Burhanuddin while pronouncing his dominance (\textit{wilayat}) over the Deccan with the words from the Quran, “Today I have perfected your religion and perfected my bounty to you.”\footnote{Al Quran 5:4. EG, p. 119.} This verse meant to signify Prophet Muhammad’s responsibility in his earthly life, was used allegorically
by the Chishtia master of Delhi to signal the end of Shaykh Burhanuddin’s responsibilities in the khanqah of his master, and a beginning of his new responsibilities in the Deccan.

Keeping up to the words of his great master, Shaykh Burhanuddin did well to uphold the flag of Islam in the land of Deccan. Indulging in mystical tendencies did not steer him away from the path of religious discipline. Once of his disciples named Shaykh Alauddin Fazl Allah declared in an ecstatic state that he would give up the practices of ritual prayers since it was decreed in the Quran that actions are for the sake of the carnal soul. He quoted the following verse in support of his statement, ‘Whoever works righteousness benefits his own soul; whoever works evil, it is against his own soul.’70 Shaykh Burhanuddin referred to certain verses of the Quran to argue in favour of maintaining respect towards the obligatory practices of religion like prayer. Since such actions are for the sake of God, and not the individual. The shaykh argued from the Quran ‘We have divided among them their livelihood in the world.’71 This verse was quoted by the shaykh to drive home the point that spiritual benefits were worthier than all material benefits put together, and that God has apportioned His will to every act that humans conform to in this world, and nothing works beyond His will.72

A similar account is available from the life of Shaykh Sharafuddin Yahya Maneri (d. 1381 A.D.) who was once faced by a disciple who argued that prayers are only for those who were still on the road to Divine unity. Since mystics have already reached the station of union with the Almighty, it was evident that prayers were of no use to them and they could be skipped at will. To this the shaykh warned his disciple of flouting the traditions of Islam, since prayers were intended to dispel the darkness in the heart of a mystic while preparing him for the spiritual journey. Any individual, mystic

70 Al Quran 41:46, 45:15
71 Al Quran 43:32, 74:1-6
72 EG, p 130.
or otherwise, who disobeyed the rules of mandatory prayers, was similar to
the Devil who refused to prostrate before Adam.\footnote{Al Quran 2:34, 7:11-12, 15:31-37, 17:61, 18:50, 20:116.}
This incident from the pages of the Holy Quran is a lesson to all those who flout the norms of
Islam, and disobey the rules laid down by God for His creation. Thus mystics, though inhabitants of the spiritual realm are never disrespectful
towards the tenets of Islam, considering it to be imperative for spiritual
advancement and maturity.

Shaykh Nizamuddin once remarked that the Quran consisted of ten
subjects out of which \textit{Surah Fatihah} contained eight in it. These included: The
person of God, His attributes, His actions, the world hereafter, isolating
oneself from everything for the sake of worshipping God, abandoning all
and seeking succour from God alone, friends of God, God's opponents,
opposition of the \textit{kuffar} and legal injunctions. Of these the eight contained
in \textit{Surah Fatihah} are, \textit{al-bamdu lillah} (person), \textit{Rabb ul-Alimin} (actions), \textit{ar-Rahman ar-Rabim} (attributes), \textit{maliki yawm iddin} (the world hereafter), \textit{iyyaka nabudu} (isolating oneself), \textit{wa iyyaka nastain} (abandoning all), \textit{ihdinas sirat al-mustaqim sirat al-ladhina an amta alaibim} (friends of God) and \textit{ghair il magdhube alaibim wa lad-dalin} (God's opponents). It was only the opposition of the
\textit{kuffar} and the legal injunctions that are not mentioned in the \textit{surah}.\footnote{FF, p. 182.}
This elaboration once again justified the point argued above as to the centrality of
\textit{Surah Fatihah} to the Quranic injunctions, being stated as the heart of the Holy
Quran; together with its extreme worth in the eyes of mystics.

Together with recitation the spiritual benefits incurred from the Holy
Quran could be heightened through committing the book to memory. So
that Sufis considered it an imperative exercise in their path of spiritual
progress. This was perceived to be the most crucial step towards
interiorising the words of God. Only through such an exercise did the Sufis
contemplate the majesty of the Almighty, which in more material terms led

\textit{Surah Fatihah}
to the formulation of such rituals as *zikr* (contemplation). Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya narrated that the great mystic of Baghdad Shaykh Junaid, was once told in a dream that an elevated spiritual station is only for those who have captured the Quran in their hearts, irrespective of a mystic or a common individual. If a mystic becomes a *Hafts i-Quran*, that is, he memorises the text completely, then he too will be accorded that equal spiritual station.\(^75\)

Shaykh Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar, a leading saint of the Chishtia order and the *pir* (spiritual mentor) of Baba Fariduddin Ganj i-Shakr of Ajodhan, Punjab, overcame this shortcoming in his spiritual career by memorising the Quran in the last years of his life, after which he left the world for the hereafter.\(^76\) It was as if God had sustained his lamp of life so that it could gain spiritual fulfillment through the memorisation (*hifz*) of the Holy Quran.

Such devotion of the Sufis towards the word of God many a times inspired the common souls, who too strove in their limited means to interiorise the essence of the Holy Quran. And what better way than to seek the blessings of those who have been pioneers of the path- the mystics. Our sources reveal that one day a man requested Hazrat Nizamuddin to recite *Surah al-Fatiha* and pray for him so that he may be able to commit the Quran to heart. The person admitted that he had already memorised one-third of the book. On hearing this the Shaikh advised him to memorise a little of the rest everyday keeping in mind the fact that what he had memorised the previous day should be repeated the following day.\(^77\)

Likewise a man brought his child for the blessings of the saint, and requested the latter to write something on the *takhti*\(^78\) of his child so that he may find it easier to learn the Holy Quran. The sheikh in complying with the

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\(^75\) *SA*, p. 449.
\(^76\) *FF*, p. 189.
\(^77\) Ibid., p. 212.
\(^78\) Slate on which children learn to write.
request wrote *Bismillah hir Rahman nir Rahim*, followed by the Arabic alphabets and handed over the *takhti* to the person. Thereafter he said to his disciples that while writing he felt from within that the task of the child will be easily achieved. Since there was no hindrance in the flow of the pen and it wrote fast he could sense the success of the task. On occasions when the pen faced hindrance in writing there ought to be certain delay in the completion of the work. Such observations meant that the saints of God had the ability to foresee the outcome of a particular task. They had the ability to look beyond the apparent into the latent and thus perceive the mystical reality that was unveiled upon them by the Divine.

Once Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya saw Shaykh Badruddin Ghaznawi in his dream and requested him to pray for committing the Quran to heart. Shaykh Badruddin Ghaznawi prayed for Nizamuddin Awliya. The next day Shaykh Nizamuddin went to meet a friend and told him about the dream. He too prayed for the shaykh and recited *Surah al-Fatiha* to bless the endeavors of the saint in committing the Quran to heart. The friend also advised the sheikh to recite two particular verses of the Holy Quran every night while retiring to bed, as whosoever did it might succeed in learning the Quran by heart and be able to retain it in memory. The two verses, from *Surah al-Baqara*, are as follows:

Verse I: And your God is one God; there is no God but He; most Gracious, most 

Merciful.

Verse II: Behold! In the creations of the heavens and the earth; in the alteration of the night and the day; in the sailing of the ships through the ocean for the profit of mankind; in the rain which God sends down from the skies, and the life which He gives therewith to an earth that is dead; in

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79 In the name of Allah, the most Beneficent and most Merciful.
81 Al Quran 2:163.
the beasts of all kinds that he scatters through the earth; in the change of the winds, and the clouds which they trail like their slaves between the sky and the earth; (Here) indeed are Signs for a people that are wise.82

Mystics being the bearers of spiritual knowledge (ilm i-tasawwuf) were capable of discerning the benefits hidden in the Quranic verses. Routine invocations of the same could over a period of time produce commendable virtues for the saint. So that Shaykh Nizamuddin was once instructed, in a dream, by his mentor Shaikh Fariduddin to recite Surah al-Nabad83 five times daily after evening prayer (salaat al-maghrib). Hazrat Nizamuddin started following it with much devotedness, and later discovered in the exegesis of the Quran that one who recited the surah at the said time would be deemed a captive of God (asir ullah). In a more mystical sense that particular person will be enraptured in the love of God. He would be free from worldly desires and trappings only to get captive in the magnificence of Divine Essence. Such an achievement signified a successful culmination of the strivings of a Sufi towards Divine union, the desire to be freed from the world only to lose his ‘self’ to the everlasting magnificence of the Almighty. Thus he was in possession of the Divine light (nur i-ilahi) which illumined his heart and shone forth brightly through his ‘self’.

It would be fallacious to believe that the benefits derived from the words of the Divine text were applicable to this world only. For Shaykh Nizamuddin emphasised that one who regularly recited Surah al-Nasiaf4 after the evening prayer, would be allowed in the grave no longer than the span of a regular prayer. But then the question that naturally came forth was

82 Al Quran 2:164.
83 Al Quran 78. This Meccan surah sets forth God’s loving care and a promise for the future when evil will be destroyed and goodness will reign. Keeping this in mind all believers are invited to the shelter of God. See, Yusuf Ali, The Holy Quran, pp. 1671-77.
84 Al Quran 79. This Meccan surah deals with the mystic theme of Judgment with respect to the element of pride and its eventual fall. The central theme revolves around the Pharaoh who flouted God’s message sent to him, and proclaimed with unbridled arrogance his superiority as the creator and determiner of all his subjects- ‘I am you Lord Most High!’ He perished in his life vindicating the truth of God’s everlasting Judgment, which is sure and the ultimate reality. See, Yusuf Ali, The Holy Quran, pp. 1678-85.
regarding the existence of the dead beyond the grave. To this the sheikh himself put forward the clarification that there was a spiritual state to which the soul could be raised and be blessed in the essence of the Almighty. It was in such a state that the body became integrated with the soul.\textsuperscript{85} However it is noteworthy that only the mystics, through their knowledge of God's reality, were made aware of such a state (spiritual) together with the specific verses of the Holy Quran which can be applied to bring about the same.

On the other side if a believer neglected his routine invocations he could well be the prey of a mishap. Once Maulana Aziz Sahid fell down from his horse and dislocated his arm. On enquiry from well wishers he admitted that he was careless and missed out on his daily recital of \textit{Surah Yasin}. It was the negligence towards his devotion without a genuine cause that caused the accident.\textsuperscript{86}

Evidently, respect for the Holy book and the words of God in it, were foremost in the minds of the Sufis, who under any circumstances were unrelenting to bear separation with the Quran. So much so that Shaikh Nizamuddin even recommended that the Holy Quran be kept with the army and carried even to the battlefield. In the early days of Islam believers were apprehensive of carrying it to the battlefield fearing its dishonour in the hands of unbelievers under adverse circumstances. But later when the ranks of Muslims swelled the Holy Quran was regularly carried to the battlefield. The shaykh also recommended such an exercise for the army of the Delhi Sultanate. However when enquired with regard to the difficulty of maintaining the proper sanctity of the Holy book, Nizamuddin advised that it should be kept at a proper place in the tent, preferably near the head.\textsuperscript{87}

\textsuperscript{85} \textit{FF}, p. 192.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., p. 224.
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., p. 318.
Shaykh Nizamuddin narrated another interesting anecdote where Sultan Mauhmud happened to be in a house where there was a copy of the Holy Quran kept in the niche. The sultan was hesitant to go to sleep as the Quran was placed in the room. Once he thought of taking the Quran and placing it at a different place outside the room. But then it dawned on him as to how could he, for his own benefit and comfort play around with the words of the Almighty. That would be synonymous to an extreme form of disrespect towards the Holy book. Caught in this indecision he sat awake throughout the night. Later after his departure from the world he revealed to people in their dreams that it was only because of his act of respect towards the Holy Quran in the lower world, that he was spared and forgiven in the world hereafter.\textsuperscript{88} Thus it is noteworthy that not only the Sufis but also the rulers of worldly domains showed their fair share of respect towards the words of God. The above discussion is illustrative of the benefits the mystics derive from the holiness of the Quran, through continuous application in their daily lives. This may not be restricted to the act of recitation alone but, as shown above, could well extend to other more varied forms of exercise involving a memorisation of the entire text or a routine study of certain portions of the Quran, known to have special qualities. Irrespective of the tribulations of daily life such chapters were crucial in not only augmenting the beliefs of the individual but also providing them with some comfort in overcoming their pains.

Sufis could cover extreme lengths of exerting themselves in the way of God, not to say of the exercise involving the memorisation of the Holy Quran. Shaykh Nizamuddin spoke of a man in Badaun named Shadi Murqi, who served as a slave to a Hindu. His devotion towards the Quran was such that he committed it to memory in seven different intonations and followed them regularly. As a result he was bestowed with spiritual excellence and

\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., p. 318.
could perform miraculous deeds (karamat). The shaykh further narrated that it was the strength of his spiritual pedigree that if one read a page of the Quran before him, the latter would be blessed by the Almighty with the ability to complete the reading of the whole Quran. Nizamuddin was fortunate to undertake this exercise under the guidance of Shadi Murqi, and later ascribed his ability to learn the whole of the Quran by heart to the spiritual magnitude of the slave. Following this the Chishtia shaykh spent long periods committing the Quran to memory. This anecdote apart from reflecting on the spiritual capabilities of a mere slave is illustrative of God’s beneficence which does not distinguish between subjects. It is the purity of the heart and the worth of intentions that determine the degree of blessedness an individual would be, rather than his worldly status. For in the eyes of the Creator all individuals originate from a single source and will return to the everlasting divinity of the Creator. Such is the worth of true spiritual insight that it made the greatest saint of south Asia feel fortunate to have received training under the feet of a slave.

A variety in intonations necessitated that the person would read the Quran, or some particular verses in the text, in different ways. Hazrat Nizamuddin recalled having seen in a particular book specific reading of some verses by the fourth caliph of Islam, Hazrat Ali ibn Abu Talib from whom most of the Sufi orders including the Chishtiyas draw their spiritual lineage. The verse And in another verse he read. This alternative pronunciation was found in only one book and in the later years of his life the shaykh could not locate any other authority which

89 Ibid., p. 302.
90 Al Quran 96:8. “Verily, to thy Lord is the return (of all).”
91 Al Quran 76:20. “And when you look, it is there you will see a bliss and a realm magnificent.”
92 Al Quran 9:128. “Now has come unto you an Apostle from amongst yourselves.”
attested such an action by the fourth caliph of Islam. Therefore such an action remained in the realm of debate giving room for much argument.

A commonplace issue that often raised its head was the style of recitation. While some would argue that a loud recitation expressed the feelings of the heart better, some would argue that since reciting the Quran signified the process of intense interiorisation of the words of God, what better way could there be than a silent and thoughtful reading. Sheikh Nizamuddin Awliya approved of both the forms but observed that a quiet recital was better. In this regard he forwarded a tradition from the life of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) whose Companions always recited the Holy Quran in a subdued voice. Such an action never attracted the undue attention of people around them, thereby leading to distraction. It was only when they prostrated (sajadah) with regard to some particular verses of the Quran that people around came to realise that they were engaged in the exercise of reciting God's Holy words.

In course of their lifetime as the degree of spiritual insight increased, sufis could locate among the numerous verses of the Holy Quran ones which had some hidden mystical significance and kept them in practice throughout the rest of their lives. Shaykh Nizamuddin once recalled that his mentor Baba Fariduddin Shakrganj regularly recited Surah al-Fatihah and Surah al-Ikhlas both during and after prayers, when he immersed himself in meditation at his cell (hujra) in Ajodhan. These two verses were close to his heart.

Following his master, Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya remarked that after completing the recitation of the entire Quran, the Surah al-Ikhlas, which

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93 FF, p. 404.
94 Ibid., p. 412.
95 Al Quran 1.
96 Al Quran 112. This Meccan surah sums up in a few words the unity of God, freeing it of all misunderstandings and superstitions that we as believers often tend to equate with the Almighty. This warns us specially against Anthropomorphism, or the tendency to consider God after our own pattern, an insidious tendency that creeps into us all the times. See, Yusuf Ali, The Holy Quran, pp. 1805-06.
constituted one-third of the essence of the entire Quran, must be read at
least three times. Through the benefit derived from this exercise any
mistakes committed during recitation of the text will be corrected. Together
with this the Surah al-Fatiha should also be recited along with certain verses
from the Surah al-Baqara. The advantages from this recitation were such that
the wishes of the reciter will surely be fulfilled. However the individual who
wishes to derive the maximum benefits from this exercise of recitation
should never stop after completion, but rather should restart again from the
beginning.97

In the same vein the shaykh narrated the story of an dervish who
when asked as to which verse of the Quran he liked most, replied that it is
verse 35 of Surah al-Ra’d. It said 'The parable of the garden which the
righteous are promised; Beneath it flows rivers: Perpetual is the enjoyment
thereof

اکا لَها دَارِم

Then he explained by saying that there was aklun, uklun, aklatun and uklatun.
He again commented that akl was a verbal noun, ukl was that which was
eaten, i.e. meal, aklab was eating once and uklab meant morsel.98

Chishti saints seldom conformed to the ideology above, for they
believed that the person who took a morsel of food at night and slept
soundly was better than the individual who ate his fill and spent his whole
night in prayers.99 So that all the leading saints of this order from Baba
Fariduddin to Shaykh Nizamuddin Awliya to Shaykh Burhanuddin Gharib
took to regular fasting at times subsisting only on water for days. On the
contrary the saints of the Suhrawardi order, like the great Bahauddin
Zakariyya of Multan, who established the order in the subcontinent, fasted
occasionally. But they were diligent in adhering to the routine of devotional
prayers without any laxity. Inspite of their seeming association with

97 SA, p. 450.
98 FF, p. 329.
99 Ibid., p. 341.
worldliness they were almost always immersed in remembrance of God. Once when Shaykh Nizamuddin was referring to the Quranic verse, ‘Eat good and pure things, and do good deeds’\textsuperscript{100} he remarked that inspite of the inclination of the Suhrawardi sufis towards worldly affairs it by no means signified that they have veered from the path of God. Shaykh Bahauddin Zakariyya being a great saint was among those few men of God who could balance worldly affairs with spiritual devotion, and to whom the above verse applied perfectly.\textsuperscript{101}

\textbf{Understanding the Suhrawardia Approach to Quran}

Mystics of the Suhrawardi order too recognised the spiritual worth of reciting the Holy words of God as an intrinsic part of their spiritual exercises. So that Shaykh Bahauddin Zakariyya, the leading saint of the Suhrawardi order, on one occasion undertook the responsibility of reciting the whole Quran in the span of one \textit{nakat}.\textsuperscript{102} But inspite of his exemplary spiritual capabilities he regretted the fact that the best of his efforts could not lead him to master the art of reciting the Quran in a short span of time from dawn to daybreak.\textsuperscript{103} Once while circumambulating the Holy Ka’bah Qadi Hamiduddin Nagauri met a pious man. The person told that he recited the Holy Quran seven hundred times a day. The Qadi taken by surprise thought that the person recalled the intent and import of the Quranic verses in his mind, rather than literally. To this the man conformed that he read the Quran word by word and not cogitatively. This naturally stunned Qadi Hamiduddin who considered it a miracle (\textit{karamat}) of the pious man.\textsuperscript{104} Thus the recitation of the Holy Quran was purely a matter of intense spiritual involvement with the text, so that any person who shared a greater spiritual

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{100} Al Quran 23:51.
\item \textsuperscript{101} FF, p. 341.
\item \textsuperscript{102} A unit of prostration, genuflexion and prescribed prayer formulae in Muslim ritual prayer.
\item \textsuperscript{103} FF, p. 77.
\item \textsuperscript{104} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
attachment with the book was more capable of gaining benefits from the exercise of recitation.

The spiritual literature of the Suhrawardi order – like the *Tawali al-Shumus*, a detailed exposition of the names of God, written by Qadi Hamiduddin Nagauri – mentioned that the greatest name of God is *Huwa* (He) which upheld his Unity and eternal nature. The same chapter of the *Tawali al-Shumus* provided an exposition of the unity of God through the following Quranic verse

Say: He is Allah, the One!
Allah, the eternally Besought of all!
He begetteth not nor was begotten.
And there is none comparable unto Him.\(^\text{105}\)

No verse of the Holy Quran encompasses the essence of Islam as succinctly as this verse does. *Sura Ikhlas* is considered by Sufis as expressing the epitome of God’s unity and absolute nature. This once again tries to convince us of the fact that south Asian mystics, irrespective of orders were never antithetical to the Islamic tenets, in an attempt to uphold their spiritual dictum, as has been argued by scholars and theologians alike.

Another Suhrawardia mystic named Shaykh Ruknuddin Abul Fath (d. 1334-35 A.D.), who set up his *khanqah* in Multan, preached the message of spirituality through self-purification and devotion to the words of God. He emphasised that the words of the Quran were imperative for the spiritual maturity of a mystic, through the following verse, ‘I do not absolve my own self of blame. The human soul is certainly prone to evil, unless my Lord do bestow His mercy. But surely my Lord is oft-forgiving and Most Merciful.’\(^\text{106}\) The shaykh believes that inspite of earnest efforts by Sufis it was not possible to purify the self of insidious tendencies unless the mystic receives beneficence from the Lord. In support of his argument the shaykh

\(^{106}\) Al Quran 12:53
quoted the following passage from the Holy Quran, which said, ‘And were it not for the grace and mercy of God on you, not one of you would ever have been pure. God gives purity to whom He pleases.’

Purity in thought, word and action was the watchword for mystics who strove to achieve such standards through various religious and spiritual exercises, but under no circumstances were they disrespectful towards the words of God, which at some point or the other formed the basis for all mystical practices.

Mystics of the Suhrawardi order placed their spiritual beliefs firmly on the tenets of the Quran, so that all the leading mystical treatises of the order starting from the *Awarif ul-Ma’arif*, *Khulasat al-Arifin* and *Al-Awrad*, strongly believed that the Path of spirituality (*tasawwuf*) begun and ended with a proper understanding of the Quran. The verses of the Quran are a constant reminder to the human being that the soul is in constant search for its Lord, while the Lord created the universe for mankind to know Him. In support of such statements Suhrawardi saints put forward such verses of the Quran where it is said that ‘God knows what is in your hearts. God is All Knowing.’ The proximity of God to the spiritual state of an individual is stated as ‘Know that God stands between a man and his heart.’

Thus it became imperative for Suhrawardi mystics like Shaykh Bahauddin Zakariyya to stress on the fact that the Path of *tasawwuf* is a long and arduous journey which can be made easier only through a rigid pursuance of the Holy Quran. Since, it was only through such efforts that the heart of an individual can be purified from all materialist tendencies thereby preparing him for his journey towards Divine union. The spiritual exercises of prayer (*salaat*) and remembrance (*zikr*) must also be combined with a strict adherence to the words of God, since they are the true believers.

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107 Al Quran 24:21
108 Al Quran 33:51
109 Al Quran 8:24
in whose hearts God has inscribed his faith through his revealed text.\textsuperscript{111} When the heart is in the remembrance of Allah it is cleansed of all the worldly concerns and in turn opens it up for Divine presence within it, so that the spiritual seeker is the recipient of Divine rewards through an illumination of the heart. Since ‘Whosoever believes in God, He will guide his heart.’\textsuperscript{112}

‘God is all knowing’\textsuperscript{113} and when a Sufi is in deep contemplation through the revealed words of God, he beholds the glorious moment when his love is accepted by the Almighty cleansing the heart and enveloping the mystic within the fold of Divine beneficence. Such analysis of the Quranic verses is important to lead the disciples towards studying the Quran closely and comprehending its mystical lessons. Through such training the heart is prepared for the Divine encounter. It was through a close reading of the Quran ‘with their mouths that which never was in their hearts’\textsuperscript{114} that the mystic realised the essence of the Quran which in turn protected him from misguided actions performed under the spell of dishonest intentions.

For Shyakh Bahauddin Zakariyya the Quranic verses lead a mystic towards the Path of God contributing to his spiritual experience. It was impossible for a mystical seeker to bring about a change in his spiritual attitude unless he realised the essence of the words of God, which were in actuality the instructions of God to mankind on issues of piety, devotion and love. The words of God, for the Sufi conveyed the inner instructional messages that lead the mystic in the Path towards Divine union. The Suhrawardi believed in an outer and inner meaning of the Holy Quran, so that their reading of the Quran was an exercise towards engaging the surface meaning of the passage with a deeper subtext that usually lay hidden from the normal eye. It was this inner understanding that lead a mystic towards

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{111} Al Quran 58:22  
\textsuperscript{112} Al Quran 64:11  
\textsuperscript{113} Al Quran 4:63  
\textsuperscript{114} Al Quran 3:167
\end{footnotesize}
the realisation of *tasawwuf* and spiritual enlightenment. It was through a
deeper understanding of the words of God that the mystic was lead to the
higher stages of spiritual realisation. For the Suhrawardi mystics the Holy
Quran was intended to be the ultimate instructional text for the spiritual
wayfarer and at the same time prepare the mystic on his journey towards
Allah.

Engaging with the Quran was supposed to be the most definitive
spiritual exercise for Suhrawardi Sufis, containing the roots of *tasawwuf*.
Taking the historical context into account it can be argued that the main
knot for Shaykh Bahauddin Zakariyya was to situate his order within the
socio-religious canvas of Multan and Ucch. He knew very well that he was
living amidst a population contra to Islamic beliefs, together with the fact
that the *ulama* were always more than ready to vent their ire on the mystical
masters of south Asia, irrespective of the stand of the Sultans. Therefore it
was imperative for the Suhrawardi shaykhs to uphold the Quranic tradition
amidst his disciples so that they and their spiritual order did not appear to be
beyond the pale of Islamic tenets and regulations. While Sultan Iltutmish
intended to utilise the shaykh as a counterpoise to the political stratagems of
Nasiruddin Qubacha in Multan, the shaykh too accepted the position of the
Shaykh ul-Islam to offer a distinguishing position to the Suhrawardia order
apart from other mystical orders. This political understanding was judicious
for both the Sufi and the Sultan to uphold the *tasawwuf* tradition and at the
same time ensure the support of the local populace behind the State.

Sufis considered the *ulama* to be great hypocrites in the rank of Islam,
who engage with the Quran purely for material gains, rather than having a
larger spiritual intention. To the *ulama*, Islam was a profession, which
needed to be carried out without any concern to its inner message together
with a realisation of the self. Sufis always believed that the true meaning of
the Quran was esoteric in nature, but the *ulama* refused to understand such
an idea and chose to remain engaged with useless and irrelevant semantics. They busied themselves with an all consuming passion towards writing of *faiwalk*, without scant regard to real essence of the faith. Such externalists based their belief on certain misconstrued ideas and beliefs, without obedience to the words of Allah and the traditions of the Prophet.

Thus the Holy Quran, for mystics, remained a manifestation of a Divine Light that guided them to the Straight Path. It needs to be noted that such an experience was only possible when the mystic had achieved that level of spiritual adeptness which in turn equipped him to visualise that Light. This quality is beyond the ability of the naked eye, since it is through the ‘inner eye’ that Sufis experience this Light of God. Only when the heart was purified of all defilement was it illumined with the Light of the Divine. And it is an absolute prerequisite that the inner eye functions only through an illumined heart. So that the mystic can identify all that is pure and good in this realm of God. Khwaja Hasan Afghan was one such mystic who was well endowed with the knowledge of spirituality. A disciple (*murid*) and deputy (*khalifa*) of the great Suhrawardi Shaykh Bahauddin Zakariyya, Khwaja Hasan’s illiteracy was never a detriment to his spiritual achievements. Shaikh Nizamuddin while narrating an anecdote of this mystic said that the Khwaja could identify lines from the Quran that were written along with Persian or Arabic poetry or prose. His remarkable ability, equable almost to a miracle (*karamat*), amassed people around him. When they enquired as to how, being an illiterate, could he identify the lines of the Quran from among any written material, his reply was that he could see a kind of light in the Quranic verses which he did not see in the other ordinary ones.\footnote{FF, pp. 82-83.}

For Sufis, knowledge of the Unseen was more cherished than being literate in material traditions. For those who are steeped in the knowledge of
the Almighty are in a state of being unveiled (kashf) to the secrets of creation. To them worldly chores hold little importance as they subsist themselves in the pleasure of God, possessing no expectation from the world behind them. They are in turn possessed by the essence of the all Knowledgeable who instilled in them the Light of Divinity, which shone forth through their actions and steadfastness in faith.

Sufis considered the person who faltered in his devotion to the Almighty to be as good as dead. Even in their most ecstatic states mystics never compromised with their devotional practices that held them in close companionship with their Creator. The Quran formed the centre of all rituals and practices of the Sufis, the ultimate manual for spiritual elevation that has been handed down from God Himself. In it are ensconced the secrets of the mystical world that Sufis attempted to unveil and encode in their hearts. The regularity in putting to exercise the Quran was considered crucial in the life of the mystic.

The above discussion on the interrelation between the Holy Quran and the Sufis has been illustrative of the recognition accorded to the mystics of Islam by the words of God. Also emphasised is the mystical essence of the Quran and its message to all those who believe in its worth as a manifestation of the Divine. The *Surah al-Fatiha* considered as the essence of the Book contains a thumbnail of all the requisite duties a true believer needs to adhere to in the course of his lifetime. Same applies to the mystics to whom the immeasurable importance of the verse remains undoubted.

The multiplicity of exercises centered on the holy book ranges from the basic act of recitation to the spiritually inclined intonations (zikr). Between these two extremes lay an array of acts and deeds which necessitate a direct involvement with the understanding of the Holy text. It is this flexibility in the application that enhances the acceptability and worth of this invaluable revelation in the hearts and minds of numerous Muslims
throughout the ages. Only when we start to limit its application that a compromise in the essence of the text occurs, leading to improper analysis, faulty judgments and above all a conservative approach to the spirit of devotion.

**Quran in a Plural Society**

Sufis of south Asia irrespective of their affiliation to any particular order (*silsila*) respected the multi-cultural canvas of the subcontinent, so that they were always earnest in their efforts of attempting conciliation between Islam and the resident cultures and civilisation. So that a Sufi like Shaykh Abdul Quddus Gangohi trained himself in the literature of Nathpanthi yogis. He realised that in the words of Gorakhnath, the Absolute Truth experienced as a highest spiritual experience was above the concept of Existence (*bhava*) and Non-Existence (*abhava*). In this stage it was *Para-Brahma*, a realisation without name, form, origin, ego, internal and external differences, and self-manifestation. This for Shaykh Abdul Quddus signified a stage closest to that of *Wahadat ul-Wujud*, where the ultimate spiritual experiences of both Sufis and yogis merged. In order to uphold this idea more clearly the shaykh referred to a verse from the Holy Quran which states ‘All that is on earth will perish. But will abide the Face of thy Lord.’116 This verse elucidates the Oneness and Eternity of God Almighty, whose essence and self will sustain forever as the single most important Truth in the realm of spirituality. Together with the Unity of Being, Shaykh Abdul Quddus also attempted a reconciliation between Islam and Natha beliefs in the realm of the secret of creation.117 The Natha theory of the Lord existing in a void wishing to be explored matches well with the *Hadith i-Qudsi* ‘I was a hidden treasure, and I wished to be known, so I created creation that I be known.’118

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116 *Al Quran* 55:26-27
118 *Al Quran* 51:56
Together with this Shaykh Abdul Quddus also attested the worth of Indian religions as being God sent, by arguing from the pages of the Quran. He referred to the verses, "Verily, We have sent thee in truth, as a bearer of glad tidings. And there never was a people, without a Warner having lived among them."\(^{119}\) He also quoted the verse "To every people was sent an Apostle."\(^{120}\) It is well evident from the two verses that God has sent for every generation and for every nation its own Prophet and Guide, who has spread the word of Truth among the people. Therefore Shaykh Abdul Quddus argued that contrary to the verdict of the ulama on the resident population of south Asian being unbelievers (kafirs), it remains without any shade of doubt that the message of Tauhid was taught in Indian religions and that they too were in the same Path of realising the Divine essence.\(^{121}\)

Thus mystics and Sufis realised the essentiality of familiarising the tenets of Islam with the followers of the resident religion, so that an uncharted distance that lay between the resident and the invading religion may be peacefully bridged. Sufis also realised the necessity of establishing a friendly ambience in south Asia for the continuation of the newly established Muslim rule in this region, which would have been impossible to perpetrate without the support of the resident population. A detailed and sympathetic study of Hindu scriptures and beliefs, beyond the scope of the current discussion, was thus imperative for Sufis in order to highlight the commonalities in spirituality that these two religions shared inspite of having widely different ritualistic beliefs. It is well documented, but again beyond the scope of this discussion, that Sufis and Nathapanthi yogis shared a cordial relation with both respecting the spiritual acumen of each other. At a certain level such an attitude of these Sufis was also welcomed by the rulers, as discussed above with regard to the Mughal Emperors, who saw in them

\(^{119}\) Al Quran 35:24  
\(^{120}\) Al Quran 10:47  
\(^{121}\) Risvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, p. 347.
the potential of forging a conciliatory bond between the beliefs of both the communities, thereby minimising the chances of social and cultural unrest.

It is evident from the above discussion that a study of the Quran was essential and imperative to mystics on the Path toward spiritual ascendancy. So that both Chishti and Suhrawardi masters considered Sufism to be an interior discipline which should be combined with an intense understanding of the words of God. Any attempt at leaving the Path of the Quran, the traditions of the Prophet and religious sciences should be deemed as the worst of crimes.

The words of the Holy Quran are delicate, yet graceful, which has nothing impure built into its composition. It is, in a sense, a grace from the Almighty. But for non-believers it is a curtain that separates him from the benefices of the Unseen. In order to decipher the essence of the Holy Book one must also understand the inner (bātin) and the outer (zāhir) realms of thought that lies hidden within this book. However it is not always that the intellect (mānāz) is capable of comprehending the message of the Quran, rather at times the emotions of the heart should also be applied for a complete understanding of the text and its message. So that the words of the Holy Quran are as different from its meaning as our souls are from our skin. The words can be read through the intellect, but the heart of the Quran can always be understood by the inner faculties of the human heart only. The outer intellect has little to do with it. It is only then that we can understand the secret that lies hidden with the text, like a delicate piece of clothing that covers the body of an individual. One can derive benefits from the Quran only when an individual is capable of understanding the Book beyond its literal interpretations. When an individual succeeds in realising the inner Truth of the Holy Quran, he ensures for himself a higher station of spiritual ascendancy.