1. A BRIEF HISTORICAL ACCOUNT OF SUFISM

Sufi ideology is based on Islam, and is centred around a personal relationship with God. Sufism’s metaphysical and doctrinal position received its legitimacy from the Quranic injunctions and Hadith. The most crucial Quranic verse for Sufis describes the establishment of the primordial covenant between God and the souls of men and women in a time before the creation of the cosmos. “And when your Lord took from the loins of the children of Adam their seed and made them testify about themselves (by saying), “Am I not your Lord?” They replied “Yes, truly we testify!”

This unique event which confirms the union between God and the souls of all human beings has become known in Sufi literature as the “Day of Alasit”, the day when God asked “Alsatu bi rabbakum” (Am I not your Lord?). The goal of every Muslim mystic (Sufi) thus came to recapture this experience of loving and ecstatic intimacy with the Lord of the world.

Sufism in its essence is timeless, but its historical manifestation descends from the Holy Quran. The first revelation to the Prophet Muhammad was Surah Iqra-96:

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5 Hadith (Tradition): Sayings and Practices of the Prophet Muhammad.
6 The Holy Quran, chapter seven, Surah 172, A. Yusaf Ali (translator), Merrylands, USA, 1983.
“Proclaim: (or Read) (6203)
in the name
of thy Lord and Cherisher
Who created
Created man, out of
A leech like clot
Proclaim! And thy Lord
Is Most Beautiful
He Who Taught
(The use of) the Pen
Taught man that
Which he knew not.
Nay, but man doth
Transgress all bounds,
In that he looketh
Upon himself as self sufficient
Very, to thy Lord
Is the return (of all) (6209). \(^8\)

Some sources trace its origin to an incident that occurred to the Prophet Muhammad. One day whilst he was teaching the verse, “God created the Seven Heavens” (65.12), a special meaning of this verse was revealed to him. Ibn Abbas, the great purveyor of his traditions who was present, was later asked what the Prophet had said. Ibn Abbas answered, “If I were to tell

\(^8\) Holy Quran, p. \textit{Surah Iqra}:96.
you, you would stone me to death”. Through this allusion to inner meaning, a meaning that is not comprehensible to all, the inner path to God was opened. Even in modern research, the first comprehensive book on Sufism by German Professor, F.A.D. Tholuck, clearly spells out that “the Sufi doctrine was both generated and must be illustrated out of Muhammad’s own mysticism.”

The companions of the Prophet were devout men who performed acts of meditation and constant remembrance of the Divine through its names and through repetition of the text of the Quran. After the death of the Prophet, this group spread and trained disciples. The name of the Sufi was at this time still unknown. Only at the beginning of the 8th century did these ascetics come to be known as Sufis.

Sufism assimilated concepts which preceded it in time. A leading authority on Islamic mysticism, R.A Nicholson, empirically proved that the Islamic ascetic movement can be explained without difficulties from its Islamic roots and that therefore, the original form of Sufism is a “native product of Islam itself.” Since Islam grew out of a soil in which ancient oriental, Neoplatonic and Christian influences were strong, a number of

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secondary influences may have worked upon Islam even in its earliest phase. The criterion for the acceptance of earlier spiritual thinking into its ideology was one which recognised the Unity of Being. The Enneads of Plotinus, for instance, was the most complete metaphysical text to reach Islam from the Greeks; and Plotinus was known to Muslims as the ‘Shaikh’ or ‘spiritual master’. Teachings of the Pythagoreans, particularly Niomachus, were also absorbed, and the writings on the Cosmology and the Science of Nature received much attention. Hermetic writings of the 1st to 4th centuries A.D, preserving the inner dimension of the traditions of Egypt and Greece, were translated into Arabic. One treatise which appears repeatedly is the Poimandres, attributed to Hermes Trismegishis, the founder of Hermeticism. Hermes is traditionally related to Enoch, and appears in the Quran as the Prophet Idris.

Zoroastrianism, the religion of ancient Iran, also played a role in influencing Sufism. The twin concepts “there is law in Nature, there is conflict in Nature” support the Sufi cosmological themes. Sufism spiritualized myths and legends from pre-Islamic times from Persian, Arabic and other sources, by expounding their inner significance. Some aspects of Buddhism were also assimilated in to Sufism. Prophets of the Old Testament

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12 See Schimmel, A.’s Introduction in “Mystical Dimensions of Islam.”
and their proverbs were important to Islam in general, and to Sufism in particular. The Virgin Mary, the miracle of the virgin birth of Christ, and the Word of God as contained in the Quran, are equally important to Sufis, and the miracle of the Islam is the Quran.

Islam emphasizes Knowledge. The very first surah, which has been discussed above, talks of it. Sufism begins with the “way” of Knowledge, but carries it to a higher form - Knowledge which ‘illuminates’. The way to illumination is often described as consisting of three attainments - the Knowledge of Certainty, the Eye of Certainty, the Truth of Certainty.

13 “Knowledge” here is defined as an understanding of God who is living, intangible and formless within each human being. Sufis referred to this Knowledge as truth, Bhakti saints referred to it as nam, Hindus call it gnana/jnanam, Buddhists call it enlightenment, Christians call it Word, and so on. Contemporary guru, Maharaji, asserts that this Knowledge is different from intellectual knowledge, or the process of acquiring and learning new information. Any one, including illiterates, can have this Knowledge if they so desire it.

14 On the nature and meaning of Sufism, Abul Hasan Muhammad Ibn Ahmad Farisi is quoted in A. J. Arberry’s “The Doctrine of the Sufis”: “The elements of Sufism are ten in number. The first is the isolation of unification; the second is the understanding of audition; the third is good fellowship; the fourth is preference of preferring; the fifth is yielding up of personal choice; the sixth is swiftness in ecstasy; the seventh is the revelation of the thoughts; the eighth is abundant journeying; the ninth is yielding up of yearning; the tenth is the refusal to hoard.” ‘Isolation of unification’ means that no thought of polytheism or atheism should corrupt the purity of the belief in one God. The ‘understanding of audition’ implies that one should listen in light of the mystical experience, not merely in light of learning. The ‘preference of preferring’ denotes that one should prefer that another should prefer, so that they may have the merit of preferring. ‘Swiftness of ecstasy’ is realized when the conscience is not void of that which arouses ecstasy, not filled with thoughts which prevent one from listening to the prompting of God. The ‘revelation of thought’ means that one should examine every thought that comes into one’s conscience, and follow what is of God, leaving alone what is not of God. ‘Abundant journeying’ is for the purpose of beholding the warnings that are to be found in heaven and earth, for God says, “Have they journeyed on in the land and seen what was the end of those before them?” and “Say journey yet on in the land, behold how the creation appeared”. The words ‘journey ye on in the land’ are explained as meaning with the light of gnosia, not with the darkness of agnosia, in order to cut the bonds (of materialism) and to train the soul. The ‘yielding up of earning’ is with a view to demanding of the soul that it should put its trust in God. The ‘refusal to hoard’ is only meant to apply to the condition of mystical experience, and not to the prescriptions of theology. When one of the members of the Bench died, leaving behind an adinar (explain), the Prophet said, concerning him, “Abrand for burning”.


A few decades before Sufism began to exercise influence on Indian society and religious life, organised Sufi movement reached its peak in the Islamic world, in the form of various *tariqa* (paths) or Sufi orders. These orders began to crystallize from the end of the 12th century, as each one of the Sufi centres (*khanqahs*) began to perpetuate the name of one master in particular, his spiritual ancestry, and focus on its own *tariqa* (Path) consisting of peculiar practices and rituals. A Sufi *silsila* (order) developed a lineage system of a continuous chain through which successive spiritual *khalifa* (heirs) traced their spiritual inheritance to the founder of that order.

The relationship with the spiritual head of a *silsila* and his disciples acquired an esoteric character. The disciples were linked to the *silsila* through various initiation rituals and vow of allegiance. Each *silsila* formulated its own institutional rules to regulate the day-to-day life of the disciples in the *khanqah*. The *murshid* (spiritual director) now came to be regarded as a *wali* (protégé of God). The *murids* (disciples) were obliged to surrender completely to the *murshid*, who in turn, bestowed the *tariqa*, its secret formulae (a phrase of patterned devotion), and symbols, on his *murid*.

The founders of various *silsila* accepted the ritual practices of Islamic law. The link between the orthodox Islam (*ulema*) and the *silsila* founders is also clear from the fact that many of the latter were professional jurists.
However these founders gave an esoteric orientation to the orthodox Islamic rituals, and introduced many innovations, particularly their religious practices, which were not always in consonance with the orthodox outlook. Though the silsila founders laid emphasis on strict adherence to Islamic law, many silsila later developed heterodox beliefs and practices.

The silsila, which became popular in Iran, Central Asia and Baghdad, played a significant role in the growth of Sufism in various parts of the Islamic world. Its popularity can be seen amongst the various orders which include the Suhrawardi founded by Shaikh Shahabuddin Suhrawardi (d.1234); the Qadri, formed by Shaikh Qadir Jilani (d.1166), the Muinuddin Chishti of Muinuddin Muinuddin Chishti (d.1236), and the Naqshbandi, first known as Khwajagan, but later came to be associated with the name of Bahauddin Naqshbandi (d.1389). The Sufis, who had received their training in these silsilas, began to establish branches in their countries, or in new countries, such as India. Gradually these branches became independent Sufi schools, with their own characteristics and tendencies.

Al Hujwiri (d.1088) was the earliest Sufi of eminence to settle in India. His tomb is in Lahore. Hujwiri was the author of Kashf-ul-Mahjub, a famous Persian treatise on Sufism. However by and large, Sufi orders weren't introduced in India until after the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate at the
beginning of the 13th century. India not only provided a new pasture ground for the propagation of Sufi ideas, but also became the new home of the Islamic world, which had been conquered by the Mongols in the thirteenth century. During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, khanqahs sprang up in various parts of India, and Sufis built up a multitude of organisations and established themselves in their respective areas of influence. By the middle of the fourteenth century, the entire country, from Multan to Bental and Punjab to Devgiri, were strongholds of Sufi influence. According to the observation of one early fourteenth century traveller, there were two thousand Sufi hospices and khanqahs in and around Delhi.

Sufism in India originally stemmed from Sufi thought and practice as it developed in various parts of the Islamic world, especially in Iran and Central Asia. However the Indian environment influenced its subsequent development more. Once the Sufi orders took root in different parts of the country, they followed their own phases of growth, stagnation and revival. These were determined largely by indigenous circumstances though the influence of developments in Sufism outside India cannot altogether be discounted as pertinent to tracking the history of the movement.

The conflict between the ulemas (the custodians of Islamic law) and the Sufis (the seekers of Gnosis) has been going on since time immemorial. The
ulema, representing the orthodox and uncompromising aspects of Islam were always with the State and against any new interpretation or adulteration with the established norms and traditions of Islam. The Sufis on the other hand represented the other side of the coin: a universalistic and humanist Islam, striving for spiritual purity. Its foundations were love and peace and sulh-i-kul (peace with all). Unlike the ulema, the Sufis emphasized more on ends than on means. It was the Prophet’s life that inspired them. The gentleness, contemplative solitude and universal tolerance of the Prophet are reflected in Sufi attitudes. Sufism is the endearing and enduring face of Islam.

The Prophet had explained what one had to do with this world. Poverty was made respectable, austerity desirable. The poor and the dispossessed could thus identify with Sufi values. In rejection of the world, the Sufis were gaining it. That is why the Sufis are still respected and remembered. Political history is full of the rise and fall of empires. Dynasties have been set up and pulled down. Nizamuddin himself witnessed the reign of seven kings.¹⁵ But the continuity and the survival of the mystic thoughts and practices can be traced in the dargahs of several Sufi saints where people can be seen in

¹⁵ According to Professor Nisar Ahmad Faruqui, 14 kings ruled during his life and 11 when he shifted to Delhi. Introduction to the translated Fawaid-ul-Fuad into Urdu by Khwaja Hasan Nizami Sani, Urdu Academy, Delhi, p144.
queues, waiting to pay their homage to these spiritual Sultans who still rule the hearts of many.

While the ulema were engrossed in advocating narrow sectarianism and religious exclusives on the basis of religion and race, the Sufis were preaching the gospels of humanitarianism, brotherhood, humility, piety and equality. The attitude of the Sufi saint towards society and state was in sharp contrast to that of the Muslim governing classes and the orthodox sections of the theologians. Greater dynamism, better appreciation of other’s point of view, and the desire to remove the contradictions between static theology and the rapidly changing conditions of life characterize their approach to all matters. The khanqahs emerged as the centres of cultural synthesis where ideas were freely exchanged, and a common medium for this exchange was evolved. The central point of these religious leaders was their concept of religion that also constituted a discourse on society and state. When asked to explain the highest form of religious devotion, Shaikh Muinuddin Hasan Muinuddin Chishti exclaimed, “It is nothing but feeding the hungry, providing clothes to the naked and helping those in distress”.\(^{16}\)

Sufism, unlike orthodox Sunni creedal belief, represented a universalistic, assimilative and syncretistic dimension of Islam and

\(^{16}\) Amir Khurd, “Siyar-ul-Auliya”, p.185
appropriated many practices of indigenous religious belief in the process of penetrating into Iran and Central Asia. It evolved itself into a distinct organized spiritual movement just immediately before entering into the Indian sub-continent. Here the author reviews some key Sufi leaders of the pioneering Chishti order of Muinuddin Chishti, who brought Sufism to India, surveying the personalities of Chishti’s spiritual successors, in understanding their role in putting the afore mentioned doctrines in to practice. Through examining the lives of Sufi saints, we gain a deeper insight in to the life and times of the everyday people living in the medieval era.

Imam Al-Ghazali

"Practice or 'mujaheda' is the first important and indispensable act on the path of spiritual ascendance and not mere theological knowledge as imported by the theologians (ulema)" – Al-Ghazali

The effort of historians in legitimizing Sufism’s place in Islam culminates in the work of one man whose contribution to the Islamic

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17 For detail, see E.H. Carr’s article ‘Society and Individual’ in “What is History” in which he says “The facts about history are indeed facts about individuals, but not about actions of individuals performed in isolation, and not about the motives, real or imaginary, from which individuals suppose themselves to have acted. They are the facts about the revelations of individuals to one another in society, and about social forces which produce from the actions of individuals resulting often at various with, and sometimes opposite to, the results which they themselves intended".
religious sciences ranges far beyond mysticism. Al-Ghazali of Iran played a key role in the history of Islam and Sufism, his unique efforts during the middle ages well documented. Ghazali’s experiments with truth greatly influenced the biographies and holy missions of the Indian Sufi saints. A knowing about Ghazali provides immense help in appreciating the magnitude and value of the humanitarian service and inspiration rendered by these great saints to the people of India.

Al-Ghazali was born near Tus in 1058. He originally trained in law (fiqah), but excelled in theology and ultimately in Arabic philosophy, exemplified by the Neoplatonism of al-Farabi and Ibn Sina (Avicenna). A recurring theme of Al-Ghazali’s work is the relationship between reason and revelation. Al-Ghazali’s fascination with philosophical logic is manifested in many of his works, as he was convinced that philosophy should and could contribute substantially to Muslim understanding of the law of theology.\textsuperscript{18} It was the excesses of philosophy that he rallied against in his \textit{Tahafut-al-Fatasifah} (The Incoherence of Philosophers), not against philosophical reasoning per se. Al-Ghazali’s reputed work \textit{Keemia-u-Saadat} (The Alchemy of Happiness) is a scholarly masterpiece on the cult and esoteric experiences of Sufism. A rationalist at heart he dived deep into the mystical

sea underlying the ‘spirit’ of the Holy Quran. His most renowned work, *Ihya-ul-Uloom-ud-din* (the Revival of Spiritual Science) is a treasury of Sufi principles, practices and characteristics, subsequently followed by all great Sufi dervishes.

As author of these historically important masterpieces, Imam Al-Ghazali positioned himself as one of the greatest Sufis, who synthesized various aspects of moral, metaphysical, and mystical systems, reconciling Sufism with Islamic orthodoxy and thus proving “a Muslim’s life of devotion to one God could not be lived perfectly, save by following the Sufi way”. He spent 10 years of his life carrying out practical experiments before writing works which proved his spiritual experiences, ultimately creating a veritable encyclopaedia in the form of “Ihya-ul-Uloom”, four extensive volumes in Arabic.

Like all prophets, saints and religious reformers, Al-Ghazali first practiced what he preached. On his return home he passed the remainder of his life in solitude, worship and writing on spiritual matters. As he was passing the tomb of Hazrat Ibrahim Adham, he resolved to never visit the court of a king, to never accept a present from a ruler or rich man, and never

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19 Ibid.
to indulge in discussion with anybody. These three important oaths were subsequently undertaken by all great Sufi dervishes.

**Khwaja Hasan Muinuddin Chishti**

"The most superior kind of worship is to assist the helpless and to feed the hungry. All those possessing the following three virtues are friends of God: munificence like an ocean, kindness like sunshine and humility like the earth."  

- Khwaja Hasan Muinuddin Chishti

Khwaja Hasan Muinuddin Chishti, founder of the Chishti order of India, was born c. 1141 in Sijistan. During his adolescence his father died leaving a legacy of a grinding mill and orchard. The sack of Sijistan at the hands of the Ghurid Turks turned his mind inward and he developed strong mystic tendencies. He distributed all his assets and begun an itinerant existence. He met with Khwaja Usman and joined Usman’s circle of disciples. Later on he undertook journeys and came into contact with eminent saints and scholars, all of whom were destined to exercise great influence on contemporary religious thought. He visited most of the great cultural centres of the day, and acquainted himself with almost every

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21 Such as Shaikh Abdul Qadir Gilani, Shaikh Najmuddin Kubra, Shaikh Majibuddin Abd al-Kahir Suhrawardi, Shaikh Abu said Tabrizi, and Shaikh Abdul Wahid Ghaznawi to name a few.
important trend of Muslim religious life in the middle ages. He reached Delhi in 1193. On his way to Ajmer he briefly stayed in Lahore where he meditated at the tomb of Shaikh Ali Hujwiri. He reached Ajmer before the Ghurids conquered it, and lay the foundations of the Chishti order and shaped its principles.

Muinuddin Chishti was the embodiment of Sufi virtues, and was famous for his outstanding spiritual achievements. He was the Khalifa of Khwaja Usman Harwani, enrolled as Harwani’s disciple, and served him for twenty years. Muinuddin Chishti was a significant player in the preaching of and proliferation of Islam in India, through peaceful missions and unparalleled forbearance. He brought the message of ‘Universal Love and Peace’ and paved the way for the subsequent procession of Muslim saints, who peacefully spread the ideology of Islam in this country without compulsion or arrogance, in the true spirit of the Holy Quran. “Let there be no compulsion in religion. Will thought compel men to become believers?” No soul can believe but by the persuasion of God. Muinuddin Chishti followed this dictum strictly throughout his mission.

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23 The spiritual successor of a Sufi saint is known as Khalifa.
24 Holy Quran.
Prior to his arrival in India, Muslims were a negligible minority, but his piety and sympathetic teachings made a profound impression upon all he came across. “The most powerful attraction of Islam in India has been its brotherhood which recognized the equality of all its members”. Arnold rightly observes, “It is this absence of class prejudice which constitutes the real strength of Islam in India, and enables it to win so many converts from Hinduism”.

Khwaja Qutbuddin Bhakhtiyar Kaki

“A Sufi must talk and sleep as little as possible to avoid all sorts of worthless entanglements”.

Khwaja Qutbuddin Bhakhtiyar Kaki was born in 1171 A.D in a town called Aush, or Awash in Transoxania. He was a born saint, and had the honour of being the first spiritual successor of Muinuddin Chishti of Ajmer. Khwaja Qutbuddin’s original name was “Bhakhtiyar”, but his laqab (title) was Qutbuddin. The additional suffix of ‘Kaki’ was attributed to him by virtue of a miracle that emanated from him at a later stage of his life in

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26 Arnold, Sir Thomas, “The Preaching of Islam.”
Delhi. Popularly, he is also known as “Khwaja Kaki” and “Hazrat Qutab Sahed”.

When Qutbuddin arrived in Delhi, Sultan Shamsuddin Iltutmish warmly welcomed him and requested him to stay in Delhi. In the beginning, the request was declined and the Khwaja preferred to stay in Kilukhari, near the Jumna. After a period, he agreed to the Sultan’s request. Twice weekly he was visited by eminent people of Delhi, and in the true Sufi spirit, every visitor was treated equally and given the same respects. Even the Sultan would wait upon him order to receive his spiritual blessings and guidance. Later on, the Sultan became a regular and dutiful disciple of Qutbuddin.

Qutbuddin wrote to Muinuddin Chishti requesting permission to visit him at Ajmer, a request which was not granted. Instead, Muinuddin Chishti ordered him to stay in Delhi. Qutbuddin’s task in Delhi was particularly challenging. He took on the role of promoting the Chishti order amongst the most eminent and prestigious Muslim divines of the Islamic world, many of whom were based in Delhi.

Forty days before the demise of his great Pir-o-Mushid, he appointed Qutbuddin as his recognized Khalifa at a formal ceremony in Ajmer, and he was given the responsibility to carry on the mission of the ‘Chishti Order’ of Sufism in India, his headquarters in Delhi. Qutbuddin continually advised
his disciples to assist people who were needy without heeding the result. The death of Qutbuddin is another story of great importance in the history of Sufism. Like his predecessors, Qutbuddin was also very fond of *Sama* (Qawwali) and used to hold *Sama Mahfils* often at his place or join such *Mahfils* sometimes at his close friend’s Qazi Hamiduddin Nagauri. The story goes that he took part in a sama ritual in the *Khanqah* of Shaikh Ali Sijzi. Taken to his house, Qutbuddin ordered the verse to be repeated each time he regained consciousness, which happened to occur at the time of obligatory prayers. He then lapsed back into an ecstatic state each time. On the fifth night he died and was buried at Mahrauli, approximately eleven miles from Delhi, at a place he himself had chosen.

**Khwaja Fariduddin Gang Shakar**

“Always keep the doors of peace open in a war. Protect religion through knowledge.”

- Khwaja Fariduddin Gang Shakar

One of the most distinguished Muslim mystics of India, known as Baba Farid, was born in 1175 at Kahtwal, a town near Multan, into a family who traced their descent from the Caliph Umar. Baba Farid’s first teacher and

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27 Rizvi, S.A.A. says that “After Muhammad’s death the *muhajirs* and *ansars* at Madina elected Abu Bakra as Caliph (Arabic *khalif* “successor”). Umar was the second Caliph.
one of the most influential people in his life, was his mother, moulding his thoughts and actions. He received spiritual benedictions from both Kaki and Muinuddin Chishti.

At the age of 18, Farid settled in Multan to undertake further studies and joined a seminary at the mosque of Maulana Minhajuddin Tirmizi. There he met Kaki, and asked Kaki if he could become his disciple. Baba was initiated in to the distinguished group of Sufis residing in the Qutbuddin’s Jام ṭ a k h a n a. The maintenance of Fariduddin’s khanqah was difficult since the Shaikh relied exclusively upon gifts (jutuh), and the khanqah did not own or cultivate land from which the dervishes drew their living.

Fariduddin composed poetry in the local dialect helping disseminate Sufi teachings in to popular songs and influencing the population, particularly the women, who used to bring these simple verses while doing their daily work. 28

After the death of Qutbuddin, the responsibility of India’s spiritual leadership within the Chishti order fell upon the shoulders of Farid. Farid undertook extensive tours over 18 years in Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Syria and

several other places. Farid himself in his own work, *Rahat ul-Quloob*, has discussed the experiences and explorations during the time of these tours.

Credit goes to Farid for giving a national status to the Muinuddin Chishti order, and training a number of eminent disciples – Shaikh Jamaluddin of Hansi, Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya of Delhi, and Shaikh Alauddin Sabir of Kalyar. By mingling personally with the ‘man on the street’ he transformed the Muinuddin Chishti order, which was until then limited in its sphere of influence, to a powerful movement of spiritual culture for the masses. The impact of his teachings is discernible in the sacred book of the Sikhs, the *Guru Granth*, where his teachings are respectfully quoted.

People from all backgrounds and social milieus listened to Farid – Hindus, Muslims, villagers, and townsfolk, to the point that his Jamatkhana grew into a veritable centre for cultural intercourse between these different social groups. Some early sentences of Hindawi\(^{29}\) were spoken at his *Jamatkhana*. He also contributed to the development of a few local dialects of the Punjab region, recommending religious exercises in the Punjabi language.

Throughout his long life, Farid was devoted to the moral and spiritual cultivation of the individual. It is unfortunate that no detailed accounts of his

\(^{29}\) Hindawi at this juncture in time was a generic term, referring to the indigenous dialects of northern India. For details see “A History of Sufism in India” p126.
conversations were ever prepared, though this individual’s writings provide many clues to his personality.

**Hazrat Khwaja Alauddin Sabir**

It is unfortunate that early sources do not refer to Shaikh Alauddin Ali Ahmad Sabir, the founder of the Sabiri branch of the Muinuddin Chishti order. However, the tomb of Sabir in Kalyar, near Roorkee in the Saharanpur district (now western Uttar Pradesh), is famous amongst his devotees. When the author visited Kalyar Sharif in the last week of June 1999, he found a large number of devotees assembled there. Though in the beginning it did not form part of the original project, after studying Sabir and visiting his tomb at Kalyar, it was difficult to ignore this great saint – the most popular saint among devotees, after Muinuddin Chishti.

Sabir of Kalyar is popularly known as Hazrat Sabir Saheb, or Hazrat Alauddin Saheb. An extraordinary saint, he had peculiar, one-off, but highly remarkable Sufi characteristics. Apart from the large number of *khaliyas* who worked for his mission in varying locations around India, Baba Farid chose three leading *khaliyas*, Jamaluddin Hansri, Alauddin Sabir, and Nizamuddin

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Auliya, to propagate his teachings. His missionary works flourished through two newly formed *silsilas* – “Sabiria” and “Nizamia”. The first was headed by Sabir, and the second by Nizamuddin.

Sabir can be ranked as the third spiritual successor of Muinuddin Chishti, by virtue of the priority of his initiation and *Khilafat* over Nizamuddin Auliya in the Muinuddin Chishti order. After the demise of Sabir, many distinguished *Khalifas* of his Sabiria *silsila* also rendered meritorious services to the cause of the Order, throughout India and abroad.

Sabir was greatly influenced by his mother, who was no ordinary woman as the sister of the Sufi saint Baba Farid. Sabir excelled in his Islamic studies and literature, as well as spiritual training. He undertook fasting and performed *mujahedas*, and finished his literary course in three years, a course which normally took six years to complete. Baba Faried initiated him as a *murid* and then appointed him as spiritual leader of Kalyar, where at the time, spiritual values were considered to be deteriorating.

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**Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya**

"The first lesson of Sufism was not related to prayers or organised rituals, but began with the mastery of the maxim: 'Whatever you do not like to be done to yourself, do not wish it to happen to others; wish for yourself what you wish others also'". - Nizamuddin Auliya
Nizamuddin Auliya was born in 1238 in Badaun, a district in western Uttar Pradesh. He lost his father at a very early age. His mother was pious and intelligent woman, and endured with great piety and foresight, she paid special attention to her child's education.

In Delhi, Nizamuddin lived in close proximity to Najibuddin Mutawakkal, a brother of Farid. Nizamuddin took advantage of his knowledge and guidance as a pupil to learn more about Farid. He decided to go to Ajodhan and meet the saint. During this period, Nizamuddin was offered and inclined to take up the post of a Qazi (judge) by virtue of his distinguished qualifications which he declined under the influence Najibuuddin.

While conferring Khalifat upon Nizamuddin, Farid gave him the instructions for the success of his vocation as a Sufi. He followed them dutifully throughout his life. Daily after the three morning prayers, he would sit in his Jamaatkhana to impart religious teachings to the aspirants with the

31 "Always keep yourself busy with mujahedas. Idleness is the devil’s workshop. In own way of life, fasting achieves half of success and the remaining half is acquired by namaz, hajj and other religious practices. Educate yourself and your disciples. Avoid all sinful acts. Make every possible effort to correct your own faults before reforming others. Whatever you have heard from me, remember it and propagate it widely. If you have to go in to seclusion, then do it in a mosque where namaz is conducted in the congregation. Make your Nafs idle and consider the world as absent and immaterial. Give up avarice and all the desires of the world. Your privacy or seclusion must occupy you in the devotion to God. If in such seclusion, you are tired of bigger mujahedas, then try a smaller one. If you may be troubled by your Nafs, then please it with little respite or sleep. Whosoever comes to you, shower your blessings and favours upon him”. “Siyar-ul-Auliya”, p117.
Ulema and Sufis of his group. Many poor and needy from the city visited his Khanqah, where everyone was provided with food, money and clothing. It was his strict standing order that everything in the Khanqah’s kitchen must be given away to the poor and that nothing should be stored for the next day.

In addition to his superior spiritual attainment, Nizamuddin was a most distinguished scholar and an administrative genius. He founded Khanqahs on the line of Ghaus-ul-Azam Shaikh Abdul Qadar Jilani of Baghdad throughout India, and sent his trained Khalifas to impart lessons in ‘Truth’ and ‘Love’ to many of the remote parts of the country, especially to its unexplored southern regions. These Sufi ambassadors of love and peace were both successful and brilliant in the execution of their missionary duties. In Delhi itself, Nizamuddin’s own Khanqah became the fountainhead of “Divine Wisdom and Knowledge”, of religious learning, and for giving moral and social training for 50 years. It attracting thousands of aspirants and scholars from both India and abroad.

Nasiruddin Mahmood Chiragh-i-Delhi

As can be seen, Nizamuddin Auliya and his predecessors built up a mighty spiritual organisation in India. Nasiruddin, the last recognized
Khalifa of the Order, played his role brilliantly under the unfriendly circumstances of the Tughlaq period.

Nasiruddin renounced the world at the age of 25 and began mujaheda against Nafs in the company of a dervish with whom he is reported to have roamed about the surrounding mountains and jungles of Avadh for eight years. During this period he observed fasting and lived on herbs.

After his initiation, Nasiruddin devoted all his time to his spiritual training, and in a true ascetic fashion, would deny food and water for days on end. Sometimes he took lime-juice when struck with intense thirst. According to Siyar-ul-Auliya, Nasiruddin went to stay with his mother in Avadh but due to the ever increasing numbers of admirers, he did not get privacy or freedom to execute his devotional duties. He petitioned to Mahbood Elahi, through Amir Khusrau, for permission to seek seclusion in the jungle. However the saint sent him the following instructions, “You must stay among the people of God and suffer their intrusion with patience and tolerance. You will be rewarded for this sacrifice. There are different people suitable for different tasks. I therefore instruct some of my mureeds to observe silence and others to close their door to the world. Some are advised to increase the number of their mureeds, whilst others are ordered to stay among the worldly people, tolerate their persecution and deal with them
affectionately because this has been the way of great prophets and saints."\textsuperscript{32} On receipt of the instructions as above, Nasiruddin abandoned the idea of retreating into the jungle, and continued his \textit{riyazaat} (strivings) in the midst of the demanding populous.

There are three or four stories associated with the title of the \textit{Chiragh} (lamp) of Delhi, the most important among them the one given by Makhdoom Jahanian Syed Jalaluddin of Bokhora (a great Sufi and scholar). Nasiruddin kept up the tradition of his \textit{silsila} honourably after the demise of his \textit{Pir-o-Murshid}, and spread the teachings of his mission throughout a large part of India. His reputation as a great scholar and spiritualist of his time reached as far as Iraq, Arabia, Egypt and Iran. When Jalaluddin of Bokhara went to Mecca for his education under Shaikh Imam Abdulla Rafayee and stayed with him, the latter told him, “Although many of the leading \textit{Mashaikh} (Sufis) of Delhi are no more, yet, by their blessings Khawja Nasiruddin Mahmood is keeping up the noble traditions of those great saints most honourably”.\textsuperscript{33} On hearing this, Jalaluddin became eager to meet such a great personality, and traveled from Mecca to Delhi to do so. Jalaluddin considered Nasiruddin a brightly shining \textit{Chiragh} of Delhi. This

\textsuperscript{32} Nizami, K.A.; “Life and Times of Nasiruddin Chiragh-I-Delhi”, p.51. 
\textsuperscript{33} For detail see Jama-ul-Ulum (Urdu translation), particularly pp281-282.
was a great tribute from a great saint, and it became the popular title of Nasiruddin since that day.

Despite Nasiruddin’s struggle with the State, the city continued to develop as a great centre of Islamic learning and Sufism. Thousands of aspirants and scholars continued to be drawn to it from many places, as it was known for an unsurpassable quality of education and wisdom for spiritual development.

Though Nasiruddin endeavoured to live up to the traditions of his master Nizamuddin, he lacked his master’s optimism, geniality and cheerfulness. There is evidently an undercurrent of pessimism, melancholy and resignation in his thought and conversations, as articulated in his famous malfuz text *Khair-ul-Majalis*. In spite of his heavy daily programme, fragile health and people’s worries, which he took on board, Nizamuddin persevered with optimism and a cheerful heart, but Nasiruddin fought with pessimism and a broken spirit. He did not marry, and modified his appetites in a way that not a trace of conflict could be detected in his life. He also passed his life in celibacy, but the efforts to control sexual desire were so great that it brought him to the verge of death. In conversations with Nizamuddin, there is remarkable restraint, confidence and genial optimism.

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34 See Siyar-u’l-Auliya for details of his daily routine.
35 *Siyar-u’l-Auliya*, p241.
However a reader of Nasiruddin’s conversations find an atmosphere of melancholy that pervades his work. It should be noted however that Nizamuddin lived during the reign of Alauddin Khalji, an age of expanding imperialism, hope and buoyancy, but Nasiruddin’s time was during Muhammad bin Tughluq’s rule, an age of relative decay and pessimism. The spirits of these saints were undoubtedly coloured by the atmosphere around them, and what appears to be a shortcoming in Nasiruddin’s character is likely no more than a shortcoming of his time.

Nasiruddin’s far-sighted vision judged the future consequences of these shortcomings of the new generation of dervishes, which prompted him to decide against appointing a spiritual successor to take his place at the time of his demise. Due to the prevailing conditions at Delhi, he believed that no dervish would be capable of carrying on the responsibility and integrity of his silsila. He therefore willed that the sacred Tabarrukart of the silsila should be buried with him. After his death, the Chishti Silsila, which had a highly integrated central structure, lost its former position and provincial khanqahs were set up in provincial towns, independent of all central control. Old ideologies and traditions were discarded.
It can be seen that the central organisation of the pioneering Chishti silsila nurtured the spiritual and cultural developments of its adherents. The successors of Chishti, as above, worked in remote parts of the country, their eyes however always fixed for guidance towards their epicentres of Ajmer, Ajodhan and Delhi, considering themselves to be under one central organisation. It was against the tradition of their creed to have any relations whatsoever with kings, their courtiers or the Ulema. To be a 'kept' dervish was an insult to their creed and religious sentiments. For their upkeep either they tilled a few bighas of land, or contented themselves with unsolicited gifts. If any of the Khalifa were found to be partial towards government services or rewards, his ‘Khilafatnama’ was at once confiscated. After the death of Nasiruddin, these two basic principles became a thing of the past. The central organisation was shattered and new Khanqahs were established in provincial centres. Many of the silsilas of the younger generation joined hands with ruling power and spent much of their time in frivolous engagements contrary to Baba Farid’s warning, “If you wish to prosper in your spiritual life, then never pay any attention towards the progeny of kings”. The implications of ignoring Farid’s advice contributed to the disintegration of its organizational structure.
What happened to Sufism after the disappearance of the visionary Chishtis? The disciples spread the message of Sufism in different pockets under different leaders. Some of them, like Burahnuddin Gharib and Gesu Daraz, were able to spread this message in their area (Deccan region). They took Sufism of the Chishti brand to South India, and like Nizamuddin and his predecessors, these saints were respected and revered, but only in their regions. The Chishti dargahs, although attracting a large number of devotees, these people came mainly from the disciple’s areas. This shows the decentralization of the Chishti order after Nasiruddin, hence the State did not feel as threatened by the popularity of the Sufism.

Due to this decentralization, the recorded discourses of the saints, the malfuzaat, played an even more important role in spreading their message. The following chapter reviews the birth and importance of these texts for Sufism during the Sultanate period, and the instrumental role it played in ensuring the continuation of Sufi principles beyond the collapse of the first Chishti period.