Chapter-VI

*SUFISM AND PHILOSOPHY*
In the Ayyūbid period cultivation of philosophical knowledge was not banned by the rulers. Under their patronage a good number of thinkers and Sufis flourished who contributed a great deal to the development of philosophical thoughts. The Ayyūbid rulers gave full respect to Sufis and Saints. They not only honoured them but also provided them with the facilities of board and lodging in both Egypt and Syria.¹ There were numerous Khānqāhs (temporary visiting places for wandering Sufis). They were ornamented palaces through all of which flew streams of water, thereby presenting a very delightful picture.² Salahuddīn welcomed Asiatic Sufis to Egypt and he and his followers founded and endowed many Khānqāhs. The first big Khānqāh built by Salahuddin in Egypt in 1173 was known as Dār Said as Suʿādā, which was originally a Fatimid building. Initially it served as a hostel for foreign Sufis, but after sometime it became the centre of Egyptian Sufism while its head was given the official honorific title of Shaykh al Shuyukh.³ Each Khānqāh had a Shaykh and superintendent who organized their affairs admirably. These men were celibate. There were separate Khānqāhs for the married. It was required of the Shaikh that he should attend the five ritual prayers. He should also remain present at their dhikr gathering.⁴ Qaraqush bin Abdullah al Asādi, erected a ribat at al Maqs whilst Muzaffar al-Din Gokbori, Salahuddin's brother-in-law built two Khānqāhs for the Sufis which housed a large

³. *Islamic dynasties of the Arab East*, p. 45.
number both residents and visitors. Sufism thus struck deep roots in Egypt and Syria under the Ayyūbids, and the subsequent development of institutional Sufism took place along two distinct lines - the doctrines of classical Sunni Islam and liberal philosophical trends. The Sufis who visited Egypt and Syria from Iraq and other parts of the world were followers of the two prominent orders of Sunni Sufism, the Qadiriyah founded by Abdul Qādir al Jilānī of Baghdad and Rifaiyah attributed to Ahmad al Rifa‘ī. Later the Shādhiliyah order founded by Abul Hasan al Shādhilī also became popular among the people of Egypt, particularly Alexandria and Cairo. It is interesting to note that although these Sufis and their followers were given over to the worship of Allah including dhikr, exercises and supererogatory prayers. They also provided the Ayyūbid army with valiant and dedicated fighters against the Crusaders. For example, the followers of the Shādhiliyah order fought bravely in the forefront of the Muslim soldiers who crushed the attack launched by the Crusaders on Egypt under the leadership of French King Louis IX in 1249-50.

The doctrines of hulul (incarnation of God in human body), ittihad (union with God) and wahadat ul wujud (The Unity of Being) developed in this period. Sayfuddin ‘Amidī, Shihābuddīn Yahya al Suhrawardī, Muhyiddin Ibn ul Arabī and Umar Ibn ul Fārid were the main exponents of philosophical Sufism.

5. Ibid., p. 17.
6. *Islamic dynasties of the Arab East*, p. 46.
Sayfuddin al Âmidî (1156-1233)

Abul Hasan Sayfuddin al Âmidî, an Arab theologian, was born in Âmid now known as Diyarbakr in 1156. He studied in Baghdad and Syria. He was first a Hanbalite, but in Baghdad he turned Shafiite. After studying philosophy in Syria he became a tutor at the Madrasa al Karafa al Sughra and in 1195 at the Zafiri mosque in Cairo. His philosophical knowledge brought upon him the accusation of heresy and he was compelled to flee to Hamat. Later he was called to the madrasa al Aziziya at Damascus but after sometime he was dismissed due to the correspondence with the prince of Âmid, whom al Malik al Kâmil had deposed in 1233, with a view to the acceptance of a judicial appointment. He died in 1233. He wrote 20 books in which al Ihkâm fi 'Usûl il Ahkâm (The welldone work on the principles of laws) is in four volumes dedicated to al Malik al Muazzam of Damascus. Lubâb al Albâb (The Quintessence of Understanding), Daqâiq ul Haqâiq (The details of truths) and al Mubin fi Sharh Maân il Hukamâ wal Mutakallimîn (Clear explanation of the terms used by philosophers and scholastic theologians). He wrote a philosophical work on dogma under the title Kitâb Abkar al Afkar in 1215 A.D.

Yahyâ al Suhrawardî (1154-1191)

Shihâbuddîn Yahyâ al Suhrawardî was a highly learned as well as outspoken pantheistic Sufi philosopher of his time. He was born in
Suhraward in 1154. He studied jurisprudence in Maraghah, then went to Ispahan, and later to Baghdad and Aleppo, where he occupied himself chiefly with philosophical studies.\(^\text{11}\) He acquired knowledge beyond the capacity of his mind which ultimately proved fatal for him.\(^\text{12}\) Having completed his formal studies, Suhrawardî set out to travel over Persia meeting various Sufi masters to some of whom he became strongly attached. In fact it was during this phase of his life that he entered upon the Sufi path and spent long periods in spiritual retreats in invocation and meditation.\(^\text{13}\) He cut himself off from ordinary society in order to lead a life of seclusion and retreat. Murids came to put themselves under him and fame of his baraka spread widely.\(^\text{14}\) He enjoyed the patronage of Sultan Salâhuddîn's son al Malik al Zâhir, ruler of Aleppo who had a special love for Sufis and scholars. When Sultan invited him to stay at his court Suhrawardî gladly accepted the offer because he had a special love for those regions. But when his extreme liberalism aroused the indignation of ulama he was put to death at the age of 38 by order of his patron. He was called al Maqīl (the slain) to keep him deprived of the epiteth of al-Shahid (the martyr). He gave himself the title "Disciple of the spirit world".\(^\text{15}\) He built a ribat on a ruined site on the Tigris, which became a place of refuge.\(^\text{16}\)

\(^\text{14}\) *The Sufi Order in Islam*, p. 34.
\(^\text{15}\) *Mystics and Saints of Islam*, London 1910, p. 142.
\(^\text{16}\) *The Sufi Order in Islam*, p. 34.
Al Suhrawardī was the author of several remarkable theosophical works in Arabic and Persian. These works are written in an exquisitic style and are of great merit. His important books are *al Talwihāt* (The Remarks), *Hayākil ul Nūr* (The Temples of Light), *Maqāmat ul Sūfiyah wa Maāni Mustalāhātihim* (Stages of the Sufis and Meaning of their Technical terms); *Risālah fi l’iqād il Hukamā* (Treatise on the Faith of Philosophers) and *Hikmat ul-Ishrāq* (The Metaphysics of Illumination).17 Numerous commentaries were written on Suhrawardi's work by later philosophers and authors, the most important of which are those of Shamsuddin Shahrazurī and Qutubuddin Shirāzī in the thirteenth century, Wudud Tabrizi in the sixteenth century and Mullah Sadra in seventeenth century on the *Hikmat ul Ishrāq*, the commentaries of Shahrazurī, Ibn Kammunah and Allamah Hilli in the thirteenth and fourteenth century on *Talwīhāt* and the commentaries of Jalal al Din Dawwani in the fifteenth century and Mawla Abdul Razzaq Lāhijī in the seventeenth century on *Hayākil ul Nūr*. These commentaries deal in detail with different aspects of the philosophy of illumination which has left its deep impact on many philosophers, theologians and gnostics.18

His philosophy of illumination, according to which light is the essence of the existence of everything is remembered by Sufi philosophers. Suhrawardī described his concept of illumination in the following words -

17. *Al-A’lām*, vol. VIII, p. 140.
"The Essence of the First Absolute light, God, gives constant illumination, whereby it is manifested and it brings all things into existence, giving life to them by its rays. Everything in the world is derived from the light of His essence and all beauty and perfection are the gift of His bounty, and to attain fully to this illumination is salvation".19

Al Suhrawardî's philosophy of illumination also exerted a great influence on the philosophical trends of the Muslim world, particularly Persia where it played a major role in the survival of Shiism during the Safawid period. Besides, together with the intellectual Sufism of Ibn Arabî, it contributed the main element which was destined to dominate Islamic intellectual life following the decline of Aristotelianism in the 12th century.20

It is evident from the above that this Sufî philosopher is best remembered for his philosophy of illumination, according to which light is the essence of the existence of everything.

Muhyiddin Abu Abdullah Ibn ul Arabî (1165-1240)

Shaikh Muhyiddin ibn ul Arabî was born at Murcia southeast of Spain on 28th July 1165. He was a descendant of the ancient Arab tribe of Tayy. He came from a family well known for their piety. He received his early education at Seville. He devoted his time to the study of hadith and jurisprudence.21 While making Seville his permanent place of residence, he

19. *Islamic dynasties of the Arab East*, p. 47.
20. Ibid., p. 47.
travelled widely throughout Spain and Maghrib establishing wherever he went fresh relations with eminent Sufis and other men of learning. When Ibn ul Arabi visited Egypt in 1201, he was ill received by some of its people and an attempt was made on his life. After leaving Egypt he travelled far and wide throughout the Middle East visiting Jerusalem, Mecca, Hijaz, Baghdad and Aleppo. Finally he settled down in Damascus until he died in 1240, where his tomb lies below Mount Qasiyun.\(^{22}\)

Ibn ul 'Arabī is one of the prolific authors in Muslim history. By his own reckoning he wrote more than 250 books, though a modern estimate places the number of his books roughly at 400, in which \textit{Futūḥāt ul Makhiyah} (The Meccan Revelations) and \textit{Fusūs ul Hikam} (Bezels of Wisdom) are important. As claimed by the author both works were written by him under divine inspiration. The \textit{Futūḥāt} is an encyclopaedic work in twelve volumes on the complete system of Islamic Sufism, in which 'Arabī claimed that \textit{Kashf} (intuitive revelation) is the highest source of knowledge. In it he drew a parallel between the knowledge acquired by \textit{Kashf} and the knowledge possessed by the Prophets, Ibn 'Arabī sought a similar recognition for his own teachings. Extending this argument further, Ibn 'Arabī went on to claim for himself the status of \textit{Khatam al-Auliya} (Seal of the Saints) in contradistinction to the Prophet Muhammad's status of \textit{Khatam ul Ambiya} (Seal of the Prophets).\(^{23}\) While the \textit{Fusūs ul Hikam

\(^{22}\) \textit{A history of Muslim Philosophy,} vol. I, p. 400.

comprising 27 chapters is devoted to the discussion of the basic doctrine of Islamic esotericism. Ibn ul 'Arabî combined the most extravagant mysticism with the straitest orthodoxy. He was a Zahirite (literalist) in religion and a Batinite (spiritualist) in his speculative beliefs. He rejected all authority. Many theologians were scandalised by the apparently blasphemous expression which occurs in his writings and taxed him with holding heretical doctrines e.g. the incarnation of God in man (hulul) and the identification of man with God (Ittihad). He wrote *Kimiya al Saadat* an allegory which describes the ascent of man to the heavens and *al Isra-ila Maqam al Asra* (The Nocturnal journey to the place of God) in which he discusses the Prophet's ascent to the seventh heaven.

Ibn ul 'Arabî gained great reputation for his poems, the best known of which is the collection called the interpreter of the (soul's) longings. In his poetry he carried to extremes the symbolism of the Sufis in clothing mystical experiences in the language of human passion.

*Ibn ul 'Arabî was the first to formulate the doctrine of wahadat ul wujud* (The Unity of being) which means that "the existence of created things is nothing but the very essence of the existence of the Creator". He

27. *History of Arabic Literature*, p. 278.
teaches that things necessarily emanate from divine prescience in which they pre-existed (thubūr) as ideas, by a flux evolving in five periods and that the souls by an inverse involution logically constructed reintegrate the divine essence. According to Ibn 'Arabī, 'Being is One. Everything else is His manifestation. The universe is nothing but the manifestation of God's attributes. The universe in other words is a mode of God; apart from God it has no existence. The universe is no illusion; it is real because it is the self-revelation of God. Ibn 'Arabī claimed that God's attributes are also manifested in man. God created man in His own image. God and man, Haqq and Khalq, are therefore identical. This doctrine has since remained the core of all philosophical Sufism.

He admires the East, where he spent the greater part of his life. He was called al Shaykh al Akbar (The Greatest Doctor) and Muhyiddin (The Revivifier of Religion) a title which has never been conferred on other Sufi. This is a sure evidence of his supremacy in this field. The impact of the doctrines of Ibn ul Arabī upon the subsequent life of Sufism has been so great and overwhelming that there was practically no exposition of Sufi doctrine which did not come in one way or another under the influence of the works of the great Andalusian sage. Ibn ul 'Arabī had a lot of influence on medieval mysticism both in Europe and in the middle East. His influence on the Christian scholastics like Duns Scotus, Roger Bacon and others was very marked. Dante Alighieri's conception of the divine comedy

drives from the writings of Ibn 'Arabî. The tremendous commentary of Arusi on Qushairi's Risalah, which is the classical model of Sunni Sufism, abounds with ideas and terms borrowed from Ibn ul Arabî's work. The famous Catalan missionary Raymond Lull (d. 1315) is also said to have borrowed Ibn 'Arabî's ideas. Seyyed Hossein Nasr writes - "whole generation of Sages and Saints have commented upon his works and to this day his masterpiece, the Fusîs ul Hikâm or Bezels of Wisdom is taught in traditional religious circles as well as in the gathering of the Sufis and gnostics".

'Umar Ibn-ul-Fârid (1182-1235)

'Umar Ibn-ul-Fârid was a great Sufi poet born in Cairo. He was the son of a notary (fârid). In his youth he practised religious austerities on Al-Muqattam near Cairo and attended law court with his father and studied theology. One day he encountered a saint who told him that the hour of his illumination was at hand but that he must go to the Hijaz to receive it. So Ibn-ul-Fârid went to Mecca where his odes celebrate the hills and valleys in the neighbourhood of the holy city. After fifteen years he was called by the saint to Egypt where the saint was on his deathbed in order to pray over him. Ibn-ul-Fârid obeyed and have performed this pious duty settled in Cairo for the rest of his life. Ali, the grandson of Ibn-ul-Fârid and his biographer mentions two sons of the Poet, Kâmaluddin Muhammad and

31. Islamic culture, p. 25.
Abdul Rahman, who were invested with the Khirqa by the famous Sufi Shihābuddīn Suhrāwārdī on the occasion of his meeting with Ibn-ul-Fārid at Mecca in 1231 A.D.\textsuperscript{33}

Ibn ul Fārid was held in high esteem as a Sufi by the people. He mostly lived in a state of bewilderment as well as detachment from the worldly life. He would often lies on his back wrapped up like a dead man and would pass several days without eating or drinking anything.\textsuperscript{34} His grandson Ali used to describe his Sufistic experiences, love of the Divine and longing for absorption into the Divine self through his poetry, which is not only thoroughly Arabian in both form and spirit, but also a perfect model of the style used by the Sufis to express their ecstasies.\textsuperscript{35}

His poetic collection 'Diwān' comprising about twenty qasidas and qitas together with some quatrains (rubā'i-yyāt) and enigmas (alghaz). The longest poem in Ibn ul Farid's 'Diwān' is entitled as Nazm ul Suluk (poem on the Sufi progress) generally known as the Ta'iyyatu'l Kubra in which he is said to have favoured the doctrine of hulul. His other most popular poem is known as al Khamriyah (The Wine Ode) on the description of the wine of divine love "which the lovers have quaffed before the grapes were created (i.e. on the day of the covenant) and which intoxicates the whole

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., p 165.

\textsuperscript{34} Literary History of the Arabs, p. 396.

\textsuperscript{35} History of Arabic Literature, p. 115.
world, cures the sick, makes the blind see and the deaf hear and leads man like the north star towards the eternal goal.  

Ibn ul Fārid's poetry has a feature that was entirely absent from pre-Islamic and early Islamic poetry. Ibn ul Fārid comes as near as he ever does to the modern European conception of what poetry should be.

There flourished in this period several other philosophers and Sufis. Of them Afdaluddin Muhammad bin Namawar al-Khunaji (1194-1248), author of Kashf-ul-Asrār 'an Ghawāmid-il Afkār (Disclosure of Secrets about Obsolete Thoughts), al-Mūjaz (The Compendium) on logic and al-Jumal, a summarized version of the book Nihāyat-ul-Amāl (The Extreme Hope) by Ibn Marzūq al-Tilismani and Qaysar Ta'asif were eminent philosophers and thinkers of this period.

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36. Islamic dynasties of the Arab East, p. 48.
37. Ibid., p. 45.