Punjabi Sufi poets have been studied by Punjabi writers and a good deal has been written by various scholars during the last five decades. Most of the books and learned essays were attempts to study these poets either as simple religious literature with a popular appeal or as a purely secular literature which was partly romantic and partly religious. No serious attempt was made to study these Sufi poets as mystical poets of the highest order.

In the year 1938 two outstanding works appeared: One was Sufism: Its Saints and Shrines by John A. Subhan who has given a good account of Sufi orders and some prominent Sufis in Punjab, but does not discuss Punjabi Sufi poets. The second work was, Punjabi Sufi Poets by Dr Lajwanti Ramakrishna which gives a reasonably good account of major Punjabi Sufi Poets, but does not say anything about Sufism as Islamic mysticism and the Sufi orders and their distinctive doctrines which were the source of their inspiration and saintly life.

This work is an attempt to make an indepth study of Sufism as Islamic mysticism and its distinct ideals and features as revealed in the Sufi orders to which these poets belonged and their impact on the people and society.

Mysticism is a much misunderstood subject and it is associated not only with highest religions like Christianity, Buddhism, Islam,
Hinduism and Sikhism but also with magic, occult sciences and cults which are not only irreligious but also immoral. Some solid contributions have been made in recent studies of Sikh mysticism by Dr Mohan Singh Diwana, Dr Diwan Singh, Dr Balkar Singh and a few other scholars, but no serious attempt has been made to study Sufism as Islamic mysticism, interest in which has increased greatly among the western scholars, but it has not been taken up, with the attention it deserves, by the Punjabi scholars. From this point of view Dr Sadhu Ram Sharda's work: "Sufi Thought: Its Development in Punjab and Its Impact on Punjabi Literature", is disappointing.

In order to show what distinctive place Sufism as Islamic mysticism has, a whole chapter has been devoted to what mysticism is, and what its relation with religion, music, poetry and art is, and how it has influenced man and society in many creative fields.

Mysticism begins with awareness of higher moral and spiritual life. It is a path and consciousness which takes the seekers near the hidden treasures of Wisdom within his own "Self", and beyond his self. The search beyond the "Self" leads the seeker nearer God and the Creator of this Universe. That is why philosophers, theologians, religious men, poets and artists have described mysticism according to their experiences and knowledge. The approach of philosophers and artists has been intellectual and aesthetic, while that of poets has been emotional. The approach of theologians and religious men, particularly saints has been inspired by their scriptures, religious history and religious disciplines. We have given definitions of philosophers, poets,
artists, and eminent mystics of different religions. The methods of attaining highest spiritual and mystical experience of all saints, poets, artists, philosophers has been different.

We can understand Sufism which is another name for "Islamic mysticism" much better after understanding all these aspects of mysticism. To understand mysticism and mystical literature, particularly Sufism, one must have the ability to understand life beyond materialistic life. An insight and perception of spiritual values and spiritual life is absolutely essential. This, because Sufism is a purely mystical and spiritual way of life.

The highest goal of all schools of mysticism is to know the essence of the Ultimate Reality. This Ultimate Reality is reached through different religious disciplines and the mystics of each religion have given the various stages of their spiritual journey and they have vividly portrayed the experiences of various stages.

Sufism has been described by Punjabi writers and scholars in a superficial manner ignoring the fact that it sprang from the personal experiences of these spiritual minded Muslim saints (both men and women), who meditated deeply on the moral and spiritual teachings of Prophet Mohammed and the Koran. These Muslim mystics were distinguished by their woollen robes and their life of poverty and meditation.

Apart from a very brief study of "Early Sufism and its relation to Koran and Prophet Mohammed" entitled, "Islam ate Sufīvād" by Prof. Gulwant Singh⁴ there is no detailed study of the evolution of Sufism from the time of the founders of various schools and Sufi Ideals, to the time of the establishment of Sufism in Punjab. For this reason, a whole chapter has been devoted to the early
development of Sufi thought.

In the chapter on 'Origin and Development of Sufism', an in-depth study is given of the relation of Sufi thought with prophet Mohammed and Koran. The faith of the Sufis in the Koran and Mohammed was deep and profound. They were all orthodox Muslims, but they were not fanatics like Mallas and Qazis. They based their Islamic discipline on poverty, self-sacrifice, love and compassion. **Shariat** was the beginning of the path. Their spiritual journey took them further to the Path of mystical knowledge (**Tarīqat**) and divine knowledge based on spiritual experience (**Ma'rifat**). Their journey ended only when their heart and soul were united with Ultimate Reality, the Truth (**Haqīqat**). These four essentials of Sufism formed the broad outline of Sufism. They have been described in detail.

Yet the Path of Sufism is to be reached by stages of spiritual progress. The seven stages described by **Abu Nasr al-Sarāj** in his **Kitāb ul Lumā** are accepted by eminent Sufis and are called **Mugāmat**. They have been described in detail in this study. Most of the Sufis refer to them in their writings. There are reference to Stages of Repentence, Abstinence, Renunciation, Poverty, and Trust in all Punjabi Sufi poets.

Most of the Punjabi writers and scholars confused the stages of Sufi Path (**Mugāmat**) with the mystical states (**HAL**) of Sufi Path. These ten mystical states are the most important features of Sufism and Punjabi Sufi poets have frequently given expression to these states such as: **muhabbat**, **shauq** (longing), hope, **Uns** loving familiarity with God, **Yaqīn** (certainty) and contemplation. All these mystical states have been explained in the second
chapter. These states are the ladders to the high mystical state of complete spiritual union with God.

These Sufi mystical states are achieved through a strict moral and spiritual discipline and well organized religious and spiritual practices. These practices are different from the daily ritual prayers and practices. Besides, the five ritual prayers (namāz) the Sufis believe in free prayer or mystical prayer. But the most important practice in meditation is Zikr (also pronounced dhikr). It is the same thing as Nām Jap or Simrin in Sikh Scriptures. Each Sufi order had its own method of Zikr ranging from loud recitations of the Name of God to silent and secret recitations. Zikr practices are the key to all spiritual progress in Sufism. With Zikr is associated poetry and dancing: Sam'a (Audition). These practices led to mystical trance or ecstasy which we call 'Samādhi'. Reynold A. Nicholson says, "the Sufis soon discovered that ecstasy might be induced artificially, not only by concentration of thought, recollection (dhikr) and other innocent methods of autohypnosis, but also by music, singing and dancing. These are included in the term Sama', which properly means nothing more than audition. The Goal of Sufis is to achieve the highest spiritual state of fanā, baqā and tawhīd in the unitive state. Fanā is the total nullification of ego-consciousness to achieve union with absolute Unity with Reality till a person reaches the state of baqā which means "subsistence" or "persistence in God". Tawhīd is unification or the spiritual realization of the Oneness of God. Many mystics have described this mystical state saying "Unification is this: that nothing should occur to your mind except God." This insight is developed through faith
and deep meditation by very few mystics. Shibli exclaimed, "I never saw anything except God." Punjabi Sufi Poets like Sheikh Farid, Shah Hussain, Bulleh Shah and Sultan Bahu achieved this state of ecstasy and union.

Most of the Punjabi writers and scholars have failed to make a proper assessment of the Punjabi Sufi poets because they always try to study them in isolation without studying their sources of inspiration. Each Punjabi Sufi owes his basic inspiration to the Founders and Masters of the Sufi orders to which they belonged. They indulged in certain practices because these practices were a part of the discipline of the Sufi order to which they belonged. For this reason a whole chapter has been devoted to the Sufi orders, their distinctive doctrines and practices. Only in knowing the fundamental practice of each order can we properly appreciate the distinctive features of these orders and the Sufis who followed them. This history and doctrines of Sufism also reveal why the people of Punjab were greatly attracted by Chisti and Qadiri saints and why they ultimately rejected other orders.

Most of the Punjabi Sufi poets derived their mystical inspiration and practices from the Chisti and Qadiri Sufi Saints. We have mentioned Naqashbandi Sufi order and its teacher Sheikh Ahmed Sirhandi because this man who was first a Sufi mystic, then became an extremely reactionary theologian who carried a relentless campaign of insult, abuse and vilification against liberal Sufi orders like Chistis and Qadiris and all those who believed in the doctrine of Wahdat-al-Wajūd (Unity of Being). He sought the help and patronage of Mughal rulers against them.

Prof. Mohammed Habib in his 'Foreword' to Dr S.A.A. Rizvi's
book "Muslim Revivalist Movements in Northern India" gives the following assessment of Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi's activities in north India, particularly in Punjab:

1. Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi wanted the worst possible treatment to be meted out to the Hindus. They were to be dismissed from all Government posts and insulted and injured on every possible occasion. The Hindus throughout the centuries had enjoyed freedom of religious worship; the Sirhindi Sheikh wanted this religious freedom to be suppressed.

2. The Sheikh being a fanatic Sunni, wanted almost the same intolerant treatment for the Shias, whom he hated bitterly, but many of whom held high posts in the administration.

3. Among his own Sunni group, the Sheikh condemned the Ulāmā-i-Su (wicked Mulas) and low-trade mystics, but he never succeeded in defining them; so that his condemnation seemed to be purely academic and no one in particular seemed to be accused.

4. The Sheikh condemned the ecstatic Bistami and Sheikh Junayd, about their mystical achievements and declared that they must not be taken seriously. But for himself he made two claims which no one had made before. He declared that he was the reviver of Islam for the second Millennium - Mujaddid Alīf i Sānī.

5. The Sheikh condemned the doctrine of Wahdat ul-Wujūd and upheld the doctrine of Wahdat ush Shuhūd.

6. The basis of the Sheikh's ideology was declared to be the sunni Shari'at or the Shariat-i-Zahire (external law)\textsuperscript{7}.

The doctrine of Wahdat-al-Wajūd as elaborated by Ibn al Arabi (d 1241) who became the guiding Spirit of the Chisti and Qadiri saints of north India particularly the Punjabi Sufi poets belonging
to these orders. Dr Tara Chand on the basis of Nicholson's "Tarjuman al Ashwaq of Ibn-ul 'Arabi" explains this doctrine thus: "He regards both nature and man as the mirrors which displayed God Himself. God manifests Himself in every atom of creation. He is revealed in every intelligible object and concealed from every intelligence except the intelligence of those who say that the universe is His Form, inasmuch as He stands in the same relation to phenomenal objects as the spirit to the body. Regarding the relation of God and man he says, 'Man is the form of God and God is the Spirit of Man. By means of Man God beholds the objects which he has created. Man is the substance of every attribute wherewith he endows God, when he contemplates God he contemplates himself, and God contemplates Himself when He contemplates Man. Attainment of the knowledge of God was the only end of man, for complete union with Him was not possible as long as the body lasted. The knowledge is gained by faith and contemplation, in which human reason divests itself of its discursive or reflective faculty. The end of knowledge is transcendental consciousness, where the phenomenal vanishes in the presence of the eternal."8

All prominent Punjabi Sufi poets directly or indirectly refer to their firm faith, that the spirit of God dwells in all human hearts. Most of the Punjabi Sufi poets, directly refer to this doctrine as "Wahadat" in their poems. It was a very important part of their mystical experience.

Those Punjabi scholars and critics who take the ideological terms of Punjabi Sufi poets literally have the tendency to give distorted explanation of their works. It is not only unwise but unjust to study these poets without understanding their symbolical
Many serious scholars of Sufism have drawn our attention but this aspect has been sadly ignored in Punjabi literary works of Sufi literature.

René Lederer says, "In reading the enreptured poetry of sufis, it should be borne in mind that though the symbols of love and beauty are freely used, yet the real meaning is veiled. No doubt this was originally due to keep secret their love, lest the profane should scoff at it. But as time on certain words began to have recognized meaning amongst sufis. For instance: Embraces and Kisses are raptures. Sleep is contemplation. Perfume the wish for Divine. Idolators mean men of pure faith not infidals. Wine is spiritual knowledge. Curls and tresses mean plurality. Blue the face of Unity. Cheek means divine essence of Names. When the symbolic meaning of the words used by Punjabi poets is used will it be possible for writers and interpreters to understand and correctly explain Punjab Sufi poetry.

The transliteration of Punjabi verses quoted in the thesis have been done on the system followed by Punjabi University. Some quotes of verses quoted were available in a few published works which have been mentioned. Other poems have been transcribed by my respected father, Dr Trilochan Singh. Some of his translations are also published in his various writings.

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