We started our study of the mystical dimensions of Punjabi Sufi Poets with the poems of Sheikh Farid which have been given the sacred status by Guru Nanak and have ended with an equally remarkable poet Ghulam Farid, who was a great devotee of the founder of Punjabi Sufi Poetry, Sheikh Farid. Lajwanti Ramakrishna rightly says, "Those Sufis who received inspiration from personal spiritual experience and acquired knowledge by assiduous study of religions and philosophies had begun to disappear at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Consequently, the clear flowing stream of Sufi poetry soon became a stagnant pool. The two chief causes of this stagnation were: (1) political changes, eventually followed by a new outlook on life, and (2) the selfishness of the gaddi-nishins and the ignorance of the Sufis."

While the Sajjadanashins of the eminent Sufi Poets exploited the popularity of eminent Sufis, and minted money from the pious worshippers of their tombs, the moral and spiritual life of those descendants who claimed to be Sufis was on the decline. A serious decay set in with the result that Sufism has virtually disappeared in its true mystical form in many countries.

"The well-to-do and intelligent people being engaged in new activities, Sufism became the sole property of the gaddi-nishins and the lower classes. The former, like any other hereditary incumbents found no charm in Sufi thought. If they still clung to it and tried to propagate it, it was not for love of mysticism
but because it had become a means of earning a livelihood. They did not mind to what low state of moral and spiritual degradation it sank, so long as they could amass wealth. Most of them hankered after positions and power and entered different trades and professions. Others entered Government service and left the charge of their mystic centres and the duties connected with them in the hands of paid servants. So the Seats of Sufi culture were soon plunged into deep ignorance.  

"Mental concentration, meditation, and intelligent study, which formerly occupied the major part of a Sufi’s time were forsaken. Music and dancing which were often patronized and practised by the former Sufis in the nineteenth century were replaced by Mujras and hals."  

These were performed by dancing parties and the dancers were generally prostitutes.  

"It was inevitable as soon as legends of miracles became attached to the names of the great mystics, that the credulous masses should applaud imposture, more than true devotion, the cult of saints, against which orthodox Islam ineffectually protested, promoted ignorance and superstition and confounded charlatanry with lofty speculation. To live scandalously to act impudently to speak unintelligibly - this was the highroad to fame, wealth and power."  

"Every village or group of villages acquired its own local saint, to be supported and revered during his life time, worshipped and capitalized after his death. Though no doubt the majority of these professional mystics were either hypocrites or self-deluded, and fattened on the credulity of their followers, the movement never at any time lacked for a few sincere men of high principles
and true faith, whose example shed a brave light in the surrounding darkness of the ignorance and misery."  

Even though the decline and decay of Sufism has been a tragic loss, the contribution of Punjabi Sufi poets to Punjabi religious literature, to Punjab language and culture has been tremendous. Unfortunately all the aspects of their vast moral and spiritual influence and their contribution to the social and spiritual culture of Punjab has not been fully studied.

We can now sum up their main contribution to Punjab and the subcontinent in the field of mysticism, literature and culture. John A. Subhan, who was perhaps the first scholar to study Sufism in Punjab with religious and spiritual interest brings out the following points as the major contribution to Punjab.

1. "A Sufi whether a Wajudi or Shuhudi i.e. a monist or modified pantheist, is never in his theology an Ijadi, one who believes that God created the universe out of nothing. Further, the practice of paying an excessive homage to the saints and worship in shrines cannot be reconciled with the religious duties based on the rigid monotheistic teachings of Islam. Nevertheless, the extraordinary thing is that though the present form of Sufism is made up of elements many of which contradicts the teachings of the Quran it has found an abiding place in Islam and is integrally related to it. It is now woven in the very texture of the orthodox faith of the Muslims."  

2. "A Sufi, no matter what his doctrinal beliefs and mode of living are, above all, in God's 'Ashiq', a lover, and as such he stands in a different relation to God from others who are merely 'abd' slaves. It is this peculiar relation that a Sufi has with
God that entitles him to act and speak in a manner which would be highly presumptuous and blasphemous in others. It is because of this element of love that Sufism has been the source of vitality to Islam."

3. "There are in our nature needs of loving and of suffering, as well as of believing and of doing, and no faith that does not contain something to satisfy these needs could ever have wielded that vast power which, as a matter of fact, has been and is being exercised by Mohammedanism. Hence the importance of the school to which the name of Sufis is generally given."8

This aspect is also emphasized by Annemarie Schimmel who says, "The mysticism of love and suffering - which teaches men to live and to die for a goal outside himself - is perhaps the most important message of Sufism today."9

4. Punjabi Sufi Poets have always distinguished themselves by a strong social protest. They have sharply attacked the moral and spiritual weaknesses of society. They have vigorously exposed the hypocrisy, the greed and materialistic craze of the Mullahs, the Qazis and people who pretended to be outwardly pious and religious, but indulged in immoral and harmful activities.

5. "There is another sense in which Sufism in its working process may be said to be a source of vitality to Islam. It provides various means by which a man can give expression to his religious feelings. It is because in its system it is not so rigid and stern as are the precepts of Shariat in Islam. This is best illustrated in the striking difference that one can see between the worshippers in a Mosque gathered for congregational prayer and the devotees of a saint when they assemble in a shrine to pay homage to him. In a
mosque the prayers are offered in a solemn, dignified and orderly manner according to the prescribed details, but in a shrine one can see men, women and children all giving expressions to their inner feelings of devotion to the man whom they believed was a lover of God, and though his remains lie buried in tomb, yet he lives and receives their homage, hears their prayers and intercedes on their behalf. There in his shrine or dargah, the royal court as they call it, they are free to honour him in the manner that they would choose and to express their love in whatever form they like. 

6. Dr Fazlur Rahman says, "Sufism claimed to lead its adherents to a direct communion with God, a thesis which the orthodox Ulama rejected. The religious fascination of this ideal was so powerful that Sufism, in course of time, became a religion within a religion with its own exclusive structure of ideas, practice and organization. To realize this ideal, Sufism offered a neat and concrete method according to which the novice or the 'seeker' was taken from 'station' to 'station' until he shed his humanity and became divine. Despite its often genuinely professed high ideals and moral precepts, however, the popular leaders of the movement gradually became less and less sensitive to the fundamental moral peril necessarily involved in an institutionalized and professional method of 'attaining to God'. But so irresistible was its fascination that the sobering voice of the 'Ulama' gradually lost its influence, and orthodox Islam finally lost its influence."

7. Fazlur Rahman further stresses the point that the 'socio-political functions, "of Sufism were" at times more specifically its protest functions'. He says, "Sufism offered through its
organized rituals and seances a pattern of social life which satisfied the social needs of especially the uneducated classes. This, more than anything else, explains the widespread success of the 'rustic orders' of the villages removed, from the cultivated influence of the city life. This was particularly the case with those orders which freely indulged in practices of singing, dancing, and other orgiastic rituals. It was through these socio-religious cults that Sufism came to be connected with organized professional groups.\textsuperscript{12}

8. "At the same time, the Sufi organizations were a kind of bulwark against the state authority, especially since 5th/11th century when the political unity of the Islamic world began to crumble, giving place to the ever insecure masses against autocratic and ever despotic Sultans whose authority was also accepted by the Ulama' as being a lesser evil than chaos and lawlessness. Sufism in its organized form, therefore, functioned also as a protest against political tyranny."\textsuperscript{13}

9. In the history of Punjabi literature from the thirteenth to the nineteenth centuries, Sufism has been one of the three main pillars of Punjabi literature, the other two being 'Gurmat literature', and "Kissa Literature". Out of these Kissa literature receives its main linguistic and ideological support from Sufism. Thus the contribution of Sufi poets has been of great importance. It has enriched our language and given to us profound perceptions of Islamic mysticism in all its forms.

10. Punjab was in political turmoil from the times of Sheikh Farid to the times of Ghulam Farid. As the Sufis stood for moral and spiritual values, they did not support cruelty and barbarism
of despotic rulers and they gave peace and solace to all communities, Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus. They respected other religions and religious leaders of other religions. Thus they became the strongest force in communal harmony and integration of conflicting cultures. For many centuries they formed the back-bone of Punjabi culture and society.

A.J. Arberry writes: "The wheel now appears to have turned full circle. Sufism has run its course; and in the progress of human thought it is illusory to imagine that there can ever be a return to the point of departure. A new journey lies ahead for humanity to travel. Some men at all events will be seeking to walk along that road in the company of God."  

Nevertheless, it is hoped that Sufi literature will continue to inspire future Punjabi poets and writers as it has inspired many Urdu poets. It is one of our most precious literary and spiritual heritage. Our eminent Urdu poets like Sir Mohammed Iqbal from Punjab has "relied heavily upon the heritage of the great masters of early Sufism and his treatment of Hallaj, with whose work he became acquainted through Louis Massignon's books shows an extraordinary insight into the phenomenon of the enthusiastic mystic who has achieved an experience that very faithful person is entitled to reach, but, but which is denied by most of the common believers, who cling only to the word of the revelation, not recognizing the spirit. Sufism is one of the truly fascinating aspects of Iqbal's thought. His imagery like that of most Turkish Persian or Urdu poets is largely coloured by Sufi symbolism."  

This rich heritage of Punjabi literature has not been seriously taken by Punjabi writers of the last five decades with possibly the
sole exception of Puran Singh or one or two more writers. A good
deal of harm has been done to Sufi studies by those Punjabi literary
critics who have tried to study the works of Punjabi Sufi poets
merely as secular Romantic poets. They have ignored their religious
and mystical themes and outlook. They have ignored their Sufi
doctrines. They have ignored the spirit and beauty of their langu-
age and symbolism. They have ignored the vital literary and artis-
tic elements in their poetry. They have thus ignored the very
kernel of Sufism and have piled up criticism against the shell of
Sufism.

Proper and serious study of each Sufi poet has yet to offer a
good deal on the highest ideals of love, mysticism and humanism
and it is hoped the generations to come will take it up with the
seriousness it deserved.

The most eminent poet of Punjab, Iqbal stressed the point that
Sufism and Sufi poets cannot be understood by mere reason and
intellectualism. It requires intuitional approach, reason and
mystical insight. He denounced pure intellectualism saying:

Faith gives the strength to sin in fire like Abraham
Faith is God-intoxication self-expanding
Listen, O dotard of the modern civilization
Worse than slavery is the lack of Faith.

Iqbal : Bal-i-Jibrel

If Punjabi scholars and Punjabi writers wish to preserve their
literary and spiritual heritage, then one the richest and absolutely
indispensable source of this heritage of sublime literary and spiri-
tual traditions in Punjabi Sufi Poetry and the wealth of moral and
spiritual wisdom which lies hidden in it.
References and Notes

2. Ibid. P. 125-126.
3. Ibid. P. 126.
5. Ibid. P. 121.
7. Ibid. P. 322.
8. Ibid. P. 322.
12. Ibid. P. 182.
13. Ibid. P. 182.