Chapter 4
CULTURE AND MANIFESTATIONS

Western scholars have been rather confused about the origins of Islam in the immediate vicinity of their ‘Western’, ‘Christian’ lands. The problem before them has been where to put Islam – in the East, because it is dissimilar to them or the West, because it is not similar to Eastern religions too. Some of these ‘Orientalist’ preoccupations have been famously scrutinized by Edward Said, in his 1978 classic Orientalism. However, in his magnum opus, Lévi-Strauss wrote the following about Islam and the West toward the end:

Today, it is behind Islam that I contemplate India; the India of Buddha, prior to Muhammad who – for me as a European and because I am European – arises between our reflection and the teachings which are closest to it [. . . ] the hands of the East and the West, predestined to be joined, were kept apart by it.[...] The West should return to the sources of its torn condition: by way of interposing itself between Buddhism and Christianity, Islam Islamized us when, in the course of the Crusades, the West let itself be caught in the opposition to it and thus started to resemble it, instead of delivering itself – in the case of the inexistence of Islam – to the slow osmosis with Buddhism which would Christianize us even more, in a sense which would have been all the more Christian insofar as we were to mount beyond Christianity itself. It is then that the West has lost its chance to remain woman.¹

The idea here is that of a harmonious relationship between masculinity of the west and the feminity of the east. However, the east itself has contributed to the hindrance of such a fantasy idea. The first contacts between Islam and Indian religions did not take place with the arrival of Islam in India, but in the latter part of the formative phase of Islam itself. These early contacts were largely unacknowledged but powerful. Interestingly, it was not Hinduism but Buddhism, itself diminishing in India and the world westwards to Indus, which played the role of the vanishing mediator. Even apparently, the Sufi mode of life showed remarkable similarities with the Buddhist monks’ way of life, except for the sangha, and they closely followed the latter’s ideas of tarka and dhyana. The Sufi conception of fana also shows affinity towards the Buddhist idea of nirvana, both implying the annihilation of individual life. Even in the later phase of the high intellectual debates among Sufisaints and regimentation, Buddhism occurs to have influenced the philosophies of Husain bin Mansur al Hallaj (858-922), al-Ghazzali (1058-1111) and Ibn al Arabi (1165-1240). Even the idea of sulh-i-kul seems to have been taken from Mahayan Buddhism, and so is the Naqshbandi practice of meditation. Nonetheless, Buddhism came to occupy prominence in the list of Indian influences on Islam, and it did so unconsciously.

Writing in the times of Great Depression, one of the most influential economists of all times, John Maynard Keynes had remarked at the end of his magnum opus, The General Theory, that the world is ruled by little else but ideas. To those who would have countered this by arguing for the richness of the actual life as being opposed to the dry and speculative abstractions of the

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3Mohamed, “Composite Culture”, p. 90.
4His ideas of love and its identification with its object show a similarity to certain Bhakti ideas, for example, that of Meera.
5Mohamed, *op. cit.*, p. 93.
intellectuals, he said: “[T]he ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed, the world is ruled by little else. Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually slaves of some defunct economist.” If we replace, “economists and political philosophers” with “saints and theologians”, then we see that Keynes’ arguments hold true for seventeenth century Indian society as well. For, it was a time which was but a topological expression for the contradiction between the discourses of Tauhid-i-Wujudi and Tauhid-i-Shuhudi. It was not simply the case that these two tendencies were two particular branches of some kind of Islamic thought alone, which were reconcilable in the eyes of some (like Shah Wali Ullah in eighteenth century); they were particular expressions of the universal processes of syncretism and sectarianism - two names to associate with the alternative views on the subjects of God and his creation, yet the basis of socio-cultural life. One proclaimed the need for compromise with local traditions, especially that of mysticism; the other proclaimed the need for understanding divinity on the basis of logic and rationalism, holding one belief’s superiority over others. Further in tandem with Keynes’ argument, if someone in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries thought themselves to be above high intellectual ideas of those times; they were simply victims of a ‘defunct’ saint or philosopher.

Upanishadic ideas seem to have had influences on al-Ghazali (who distinguished between this-worldly and that-worldly) and al Hujwiri (who distinguished between human and divine). The various wahadat-ul-wujud doctrines sprouting in Indian in the seventeenth century owed much of their prehistory to the ideas of Ibn al Arabi, whose ideas of love and pantheism appear less in tune with core Islamic principles and more in tune with

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Upanishadic Hinduism, though it is difficult to ascertain a direct link. It has been argued by R.A. Nicholson that in some cases of Sufism, the idea of unity between God and its creation, and His grace came out of Christian and Vedantic influence. However, most early interaction between Islam and Hinduism took place thanks to the Nathpanthis, who were basically a yoga practicing group of saints, systematized by Gorakhnath, who travelled from as far as South India to West Asia. They are said to have formed a base at Peshawar. Islamic or Sufi interest in yogic practices is evident from the beginning, with as early as twelfth century translations like that of Patanjali’s *Yoga-sutra* by Al Biruni appear. Qazi Rukunund Din Samarqandi translated *Amrita-kunda* into Arabic. Several ‘Hindu’ practices thus came to be associated with the Sufis, like ability to transcend time-space and life or death. They came to be attributed with magic and healing properties. Their modes of salutations (bowing down full to the Sufi), of welcoming the visitors (offering water), cults and practices (shaving off the heads of the visitors, and hanging oneself upside down into a well for weeks) bore the stamp of earlier Brahminical and sub-Brahminical practices, that added to the Indian Sufis qualities which the Indian masses sought in their saints, and thus brought the Sufi ideas in close connection to their lives.

Stretching further, the *Bhagvad Gita* can also be thought of as the source of mysticism common to practices associated with the Hindu set of religions and those associated with Islam or Sufism. According to Rizvi, Nizamuddin Auliya disagreed with using the human body as a metaphor for God’s form. This disagreement, although in tune with Islamic conception of

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9*Alberuni’s India*, vol. I, p. 55.
God as formless, forces us to suppose those who might have been forwarding this, and against whom Auliya had ‘disagreed’. Another Sufi, Abdul Quddus Gangohi argued that Shiva (Moon) and Shakti (Sun) could be worshipped together by hanging oneself upside down. Northern Bihar, thanks to its considerable distance from the centre of power, Delhi, allowed the Sufis to intermingle with local populations and pick up their languages, thoughts, beliefs and rituals.\footnote{S.H. Askari, \textit{Sufism in Medieval Bihar}, Patna, 1998, pp. 1-86.}

The composite nature of the Sufi ‘micro-practices’ were a means for it to identify itself with the contemporary ‘structures of feelings’, to use Raymond Williams’ highly useful term. Williams defines this terms in many ways but some key features are like this: ‘in one sense, [...] structure of feeling is the culture of a period: it is the particular living result of all the elements in the general organization’; ‘[it is the] recorded communication that outlives its bearers, the actual living sense, the deep continuity that makes the communication possible’; it is not ‘learned’, ‘in the formal sense’.\footnote{Raymond Williams, \textit{The Long Revolution}, London, 1961, pp. 64-65.} According to Williams, each new generation has its own structure of feeling, which it may learn from the previous generation, however unconsciously, but it would modify it for its own use. The Sufi saints, therefore, modified this earlier, ‘pre-Islamic’ culture of India for their own use, but in the process, they got modified themselves. He further states:

Once the carriers of such a structure die, the nearest we can get to this vital element is in the documentary culture, from poems to buildings and dress-fashions, and it is this relation that gives significance to the definition of culture in documentary terms \footnote{Williams, \textit{“Long Revolution”}, p. 65.}
We need to distinguish three levels of culture, even in its most general
definition. There is the lived culture of a particular time and place, only fully
accessible to those living in that time and place. There is the recorded culture,
of every kind, from arts to the most everyday facts: the culture of a period.
There is also, as the factor connecting lived culture and period cultures, the
culture of the selective tradition.\(^1\)

What Raymond Williams is struggling here is to how to grasp the
culture of a time long after its passing: could we simply look at the documents
and gain insights about it, or should we pick certain key strands, again based
upon a selective reading, and then choose to narrate? Or, should we look for
continuity in matters of culture, and identify those which are still living
elements of a dead tradition, and on the basis of that, perceive the culture of an
earlier period? Such structures of feeling functioned largely in the manner of
Freudian unconscious – they were not imparted consciously but constituted the
part-and-parcel of the Indian culture. It does not mean, however, that there was
no struggle among the ideas, or that they were not formulated in rigorous
philosophical modes. What needs to be emphasized is that the hegemonic
ideology was that of \textit{wujudi}, and the \textit{shuhudi} ideology had to consciously
make way for itself, if it at all could.

The \textit{wujudi} ideology was not limited to some sections of Islamic
following. Its contours were assembled by and re-distributed in the long waves
of Bhakti and Sufi, the most radical of whom had constantly underlined the
futility of denominational and occupational (caste) divisions. In Aziz
Ahmad’s view, the whole of medieval Indian history is full of tensions
between two incompatible religions: Islam and Hinduism have no meeting
ground. This view not only oversimplifies the internal divisions between these
two religions, which were not only those marked powerfully by class, gender

\(^1\)Williams, “\textit{Long Revolution}”, p. 66.
or by ethnicity of all hues, it also portrays the “clash” as that being between two religions than between, on the one hand, ideologies of humanism, egalitarianism, universalism that transcended religious divide and, on the other hand, ideologies that served some narrow and sectional interests.

The history of medieval and modern India is to a very considerable extent a history of Hindu-Muslim religio-cultural tensions, interspersed with movements or individual efforts at understanding, harmony and even composite development. The divisive forces have proved much more dynamic than the cohesive ones.15

It also overlooks a lot of horizontal or even vertical alliances, and the large grey areas of material life which Muslims and non-Muslims shared. In other words, this view is guilty of the fallacy of post festum illusion: if something has gone awry in the modern era, it also must have been similar in earlier times.16

We have noted in the previous chapter the practice of slavery, in the markets of Delhi and other important cities, among the elite classes (which included non-Muslims too). It is the task of this chapter to examine the basis of these religious compromises (devoid of principles) and to see the long-term, structural adjustments underlying them. Indeed, the efforts of many people,

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16 Karl Marx, *Capital*, London, 1970, vol. I, p. 87. Karl Marx called this illusion as a case of ‘reification’. Reification refers to the inversion of concrete historical relations, or to see them backwards. He writes: “Man’s reflections on the forms of social life, and consequently, also, his scientific analysis of those forms takes a course directly opposite to that of their actual historical development. He begins *post festum*, with the results of the process of development ready to hand before him”.

like Dara Shikoh, to unite Hinduism and Islam on theological grounds were futile, precisely because even if theological similarities are found, they were belied by the social content of their religions. A compromise by one religion meant to adopt the virtues and (mostly) vices of other, but it did not mean a synthesis based upon the primacy of the individual and equality, something which only the modern consciousness did. A more complicated picture should emerge, which allows to put forward the thesis of an intellectual revolt of humanistic universalism, no doubt inspired from above by Akbar’s attempts in late 16th century, against casteism and bigotry, and which involved almost every class of the society. It should also be noted that even if Islam in itself proved insufficient to pose as an emancipator ideology (enough time had passed, for it had been in India for a millennium by the time of our study, i.e. seventeenth century), its amalgamation in India with the syncretic and humanistic traditions was not due to its ‘inner greatness’; rather, Islam and Hinduism both got challenged by the former. This humanism took various shapes in Indian history: it first came as the heterodox sects in ancient times (Buddhism, Jainism, Ajivikas); it assumed the form of Charvaka and the materialist-atheism; it then assumed the idealism of Bhakti and then it merged with the anti-Brahmin movements of the modern times. It inspired a re-reading of religious text, of new ways of thinking and organizing social life. Yet, its material basis lacked and that is why it remained forever in shadows.

Although Aziz Ahmad claims that little that was of universal, theoretical value was ever written within Indian Sufism, one of the earliest and most important authoritative work on Sufism was written at Lahore, by al-Hujwiri as Kashul-Majahib, which divided Sufis amongst twelve groups, of whom ten were legitimate (maqbul) and two were illegitimate (mardud). It is

17 Ahmad, Intellectual History, 1969, p. 34.
18 S.A.A. Rizvi, Muslim Revivalist Movements in North India in the Sixteenth and the Seventeenth Centuries, New Delhi, 1993, p. 3.
worthy of note that the two condemned sects are Hululis and Hallaj, which bordered on idolatry similar to Hindus. The Sufis did away with sectarianism in another manner: they emphasized that not following one religious text did not mean that one opposed it, for there was never any absolute antagonism.\textsuperscript{19} Everything and everybody was a creation of God.

Chistis were one of the most important \textit{wujudi} orders of Indian Sufism, as they were influenced by Ibn Arabi’s pantheistic ideas. This connection enabled them to gain the sympathies of many a non-Muslims (i.e. Hindu), some of whom they were able to convert into Islam. Like many others, they practiced \textit{pranayam} (though, without calling it with the name) and practiced \textit{chilla} (in which the Sufi had to hang himself upside down for forty days into a well). They had a mystical aura around them, and they proclaimed humanism, and claimed to provide solutions to people’s problems. The Chisti’s order were founded by Khwaja Abu Ishq Shami,\textsuperscript{20} at Herat in Afghanistan. Soon after the fall of Prithviraj, Khwaja Muinuddin Hasan came to India, in the context of destruction unleashed by Changez Khan upon Central Asia, and made Ajmer as his base, where he stayed till his death in 1236 AD. He had widely travelled, and finding the atmosphere at Ajmer more conducive and welcoming, he settled there for occasional visits to Delhi. It seems that he was not a missionary, and he confined him pretty much to himself. His posthumous fame exploded, and by the fourteenth century his name was widely known.\textsuperscript{21} The appeal of his order was not confined to the Muslims but to people of all faiths, as even those who did not convert would send expensive donations and


\textsuperscript{21}Mohammad Habib, ‘Chisti Mystic Records of the Sultanate Period’, \textit{Medieval Indian Quarterly}, vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 15-37.
gifts in his name. Among later developments, the organization of *majlis-us-sama* - a form of spiritual dance with some singing - was the most significant one. It is even said to have caused the death of one of the most prominent man of *Silsilah*, Khwaja Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki, who died out of extreme ecstasy. This was in contrast to the mass kitchen that was a feature of Pakpattan. Another *Silsilah* saint, Shaikh Hamiduddin Suif, settled in the countryside and adopted the lifestyle of a peasant, and adopted several practices of the Hindu population- including yoga and vegetarianism. However, among those who remained stuck to the seat of the Sufi, Khwaja Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki remains the most important. His broad, universalistic ideas led him to extensive journeys into Northern and Eastern India, and he came in contact with various yogis. It was due to their influence that he made the distinction between *Alam-i-Ulwi* (the world of greatness), and *Alam-i-Sufli* (the world of lowliness), based upon a certain understanding of human body which even had affinities with the Manusmritic idea of different parts of the body representing the *varnas*: from head to navel, it was *Alam-i-Ulwi*, and from navel to feet it was *Alam-i-Sufli*. A true Sufi had to work his way through by concentrating on the correct functioning of the former. It was another Sufi, Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya, though, who achieved the heights of fame in the thirteenth and fourteenth century. He had been in touch with Baba Farid at Pakpattan, and he based himself in Delhi. He is said to have remarked, rather famously, that many Hindus knew that Islam was the true religion, but they did not embrace it. He was followed by Shaikh Nasiruddin Chirag-i-Delhi, who tended to bring Sufism more in tune with orthodoxy. He tried to

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stop several ‘non-Islamic’ practices like sama and the virtual idolatry of the graves of the saints - something which was also banned by Sultan Sikandar Lodi.\textsuperscript{27} In the fifteenth century, Muhammad Gesudaraz wrote many works on the Sufi thought. It is rather too well-known to recounting that Shaikh Salim was almost worshipped by Akbar, thus elevating Chistism almost into the ruling ideology for some time.

The Suhrawardis were another set of important Sufi orders, known more for their proximity to power centres than their Sufism. Their important leaders include Shaikh Najibuddin Abdul Qahir Suhrawardi (d. 1169), Shihabuddin Suhrawardi (both in Iraq), Baha’uddin Zakariya, and Jalaluddin Tabrizi. However, Ruknuddin remains most important as he accepted the Sultanate’s offer of affluent lifestyle in return for giving it influence over the followers in provinces.

In the seventeenth century, the Qadiris were the most prominent Sufi order during Shahjahan’s time. One of their most prominent saint, Shaikh Abdur Rehman Chisti, proclaimed that Chisti saints had been entrusted with the task of protecting the state ruler. Thus, in the case of Chistis at least, the idea of a Sufi self-insulating himself from the charms of political power did not apply.\textsuperscript{28}

Ideological battles were fought on grounds of defending one Muslim thinker against the other, or criticizing one from the point of view of others (mostly regarded as possessing a more refined outlook or close to the spirit of Islam). Thus, Shaikh Muhibullah of Allahabad sided with Ibn Arabi (the doyen of pantheism in Sufi thought), and took cudgels against Simnani and Gesu Daraz. In most cases, divisions of philosophical or cultural thoughts were

\textsuperscript{27}Khairul-Majlis, p. 157.
\textsuperscript{28}Mirat-ul-Asrar, ff. 148a, 438a, 507a-509b, cf. Rizvi, Revivalist Movements, p. 331.
rather sharp, but they also remained porous in notable cases. Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi, also known as Mujaddid, remains unparalleled in this regard. Sirhindi was foremost a mystic, apparently uninterested in political matters. Trained in the Naqshbandi Sufi order, Sirhindi himself practiced many pantheistic rituals before finally settling for a puritanical Islam. His mode of intervention in the polity was to write letters to the Mughal kings in the self-proclaimed capacity of being the biggest Muslim intellectual of the times, contained in the collection entitled *Maktubat*. His vantage point was *wahadat-ul-wujud*, and he argued for the wholehearted following of *shara* and proselytization by the Muslims state. Having received his education from Khwaja Muhammad Baqi Billah, he wrote to him letters describing his dreams, in one of which he saw that there was no difference between Islam and heresy. Realizing that Akbar’s death meant the passing of reigns to a probably more Islamic ruler - Jahangir - he began to write ideological letters to him. He perceived himself gifted with rare intellect to re-establish God’s idea, hence the name ‘Mujaddid’. When Jahangir summoned him to his court, upon hearing of his Sufism, Sirhindi did not perform *sajda* to Jahangir; rather, he acted out in the Islamic way and said *salam vale kum*. This irked Jahangir and he ordered his arrest. Probably, the deeper reason of his arrest was due to his aggrandized self-perception, and the heresy committed in his dreamy, ecstatic moments (described in the letters to Baqi Billah that there was no difference between Islam and heresy), that Jahangir ordered his arrest. It is not clear whether he was arrested for, overall, spreading the message of fundamentalist adherence to religion, or for the opposite reason: for degrading Prophet by equating himself with him, and for ‘dreaming’ that Islam was same as heresy. However, the mystic’s own life was a carefully detailed emulation of Prophet Muhammad’s routine, down to such

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minor practices as brushing one’s teeth. In hagiographical details, he is presented as someone who recited Quran with the most attractive manner, yet, at a subjective level, trying to avoid the music of doing so. He considered state power to be the most important tool for the safeguard of Islam, and yet he comes across as someone uninterested in material well-being.

In the Indian subcontinent, there is virtually no record of any mass conversion of non-Muslims to Islam via state repression, largely because the Muslim state was not interested in converting the infidels (as long as it got its land revenue out of the overwhelmingly peasant population), and more so because of the cultural-historical reasons. This is rather surprising because, from William Jones onwards, including Max Mueller and so on, there is virtually no Western scholar who has not glamorized the “overwhelmingly religious” or “spiritual” Indian way of life, especially in the countryside. This is not to deny any spiritual experience to the commoners, rather, it is to underline the class nature of such experience: elite politics looked upon itself as belonging to the Islamic world (with exceptions like Amir Khusrau and Akbar), with the Ulemas owning influence in theological matters, if not in judicial or administrative; while at the popular level, religion was mostly a means to cope with the harsh reality, or rather, a means to escape it. The interaction between Sufism and Hinduism was thus, another arena of lower-class solidarity, however much off the target.

Sufis were responsible for most conversions. They did not do so on purely scriptural principles of the Shara, but they synthesized elements from Hinduism, as emphasized again and again. Sufism came to develop bi-shar (irreligious) roots, from the point of the view of the state clerics and purists.

The cleric may have complained time to time but they could do nothing as the Sufis were regarded by the state as its extended arms.

Hence, the very fact that even today a lot of Hindus visit the graveyards of the Sufi saints with gifts and flowers, their veneration of these graves and even other ‘administrative’ building like the kosn minarets, the commonalities of a whole linguistic tradition, reflected in literature and music - all this leads us to the historical roots of these traditions and puts us firmly into the period in which they may not have been born but in which they consolidated and even ossified as the evolutionary memory of a composite civilization.

Thus, we find a whole set of Sufis - the Gurzmar sect, an offshoot of the Junaidi order - inflicting mace wounds upon themselves. The Mastanas of the Gujarat used intoxications to get into ecstasy. The vicinity of the vamm margi cannot be ruled out. Dabistan-i-Majahib mentions two Hindu fakirs used to eating cow’s flesh, while also carrying the caste-marks on forehead and the ‘zunar’ (the caste-thread for upper-classes).\textsuperscript{32} When captured by Hindus, they responded that both the cow-flesh and the thread ultimately came from the four elements earth, water, fire and space. The Chisti saints would collect food from the people just like Hindu saints would do, in a certain defiance of the Islamic principles. The Binawa and the Nawshahi orders, heterodox versions of the Qadiriya Sufism, would even mix music and dancing with the formal-ritual processes of Islam.\textsuperscript{33} The Qalandar Sufis too adopted a lot of practices from their Hindu counterparts, with Sarmad, the wanderer-mystic friend of Dara Shikoh, even went out completely naked like Naga Sadhus. Similarly, a lot of Muslims (mostly Shias) used to tie amulets with a blessing or a couplet from Quran into their necks. Almost all the saints were thought to be possessed with magic and healing powers, proper services and love to whom

\textsuperscript{32}Dabistan-i-Mazahib, p. 230.
\textsuperscript{33}Ahmad, Intellectual History, p. 45.
would result in one’s desires being fulfilled. One such practice was *jhaad-foonk*, which involved chanting of Quranic verses in the same manner as Hindu mantras, to ward off evil spirits. Similarly, the cult of animal sacrifice also entered Islamic culture.

The very fact that pantheistic people like Miyan Mir received more attention in the many works written around the court, and the fact that the self-proclaimed, biggest ‘intellectual’ of the seventeenth century – Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi – was totally bypassed, even arrested for a couple of years by Jahangir, tells us about the orientation of the Mughal elites. Paradoxically, the monotheistic Naqshbandis had always been clear about associating themselves with state power, for the defense and propagation of their faith, and did not rule out leading comfortable and luxurious lives. On the other hand, the pantheistic Sufis lived very ascetic lives despite being overwhelmingly favoured by the Mughal court. Despite the highly emotional revering conferred upon the Sufis by the kings and the royal family, and being supported financially in a big way, the pantheistic orders became vehicles of state ideology in the peripheries of the Empire.

Sirhindi or Mujaddid was surrounded by a lot of talented students of Islamic thought, two of whom were even sons of his own teacher Baqi Billah. He thought to train them in the Naqshbandi philosophy of *Tauhid-ul-Shuhud*. However, he was shocked to see both of them discarding the hard, colourless ideas of *shuhudi*. The sons of Baqi Billah were trained by Khwaja Husamud-Din, who went against the ideology of the former. Curiously, the very progenies of Baqi Billah disagreed with his philosophy. Born in 1601, Khawaja Abdullah, the elder son of Khwaja Baqi Billah, devoted his energies

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in countering the sectarian tendencies propounded by Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi, after having first debated with him positively, and later authoring a quasi-polemical work called as *Mubligh-ur-Rijal.*\(^{36}\) Having a great respect for his teacher Khwaja Husamud-Din, and influenced by the philosophy of Ibn Arabi, he wrote a biography of his teacher. The latter was also the receiving end of Sirhindi’s polemics. Abdullah also prepared a huge hagiography of Sufis.\(^{37}\) It is a stout defense of *wujudi* ideology, in the face of Sirhindi’s polemic.

*Dabistan-Mazahib* was written by someone with the poetic name of Mobad Shah (Mohsin Fani), who presumable had a Parsi background.\(^{38}\) His work is impressively impartial in understanding different religions, and paralleled the efforts of Dara Shikoh at a rather less privileged level of society, and also freer from the clutches of class and religious boundaries. Its separation of the Hindus from Vairagis, Vaishnavites and other sects is significant. Its tone underlines a carefully cold and dispassionate understanding of various religions. It is both a significant source, and a proof of the inquisitive mind of its times.

The younger son, Khwaja Ubaidullah or Khwaja Khurd, although born around the same time as Khwaja Abduallah, too renounced the *shuhudi* doctrine. He was trained by Sirhindi for some time in his formative years, but later on shifted under the tutelage of Husamuddin.\(^{39}\) Very strong argumentation and brainstorming by Mujaddid could not move him from the *wujudi* doctrine. He emphasized the idea of *fana*, obtainable through the

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\(^{36}\) Rizvi, *Revivalist Movements*, p. 331.


\(^{39}\) Rizvi, *Revivalist Movements*, p. 332.
practice of *majlis-us-sama*,40 about which we have observed that it is borrowed from the assimilation of Hindu practices into the Muslim traditions.41 He even had the support of classics like Ibn Arabi’s *Futuhat-i-Makkiya*.42 The turn of the tables went even further: Khwaja Khurd went on to write letters to the son of someone no one less than Mujaddid himself, and argued him to join the *wujudi* doctrine.43 He rejected the differences between the ideas of Ibn Arabi and Alauddaula Simnani as being discursive. He rather favored *Shara* to suit the world reality, than those who argued the opposite.44

Shaikh Muhibbullah Ilahabadi sought to defend Ibn Arabi against his opponents, in a work which spanned a lifetime. Aziz Ahmad mentions him as the only one to have had written some work of universal value from within Indian Sufism.45 His works are now preserved as *Makatib-i-Muhibbullah Ilahabadi*.46 Even the Prince Dara Shikoh approached him for a copy of his work, which was rather meant for private circles.47 He wrote *Manazir-i-Akhas-ul-Khawas*, in which he gave a detailed explanation of Ibn Arabi’s work.48 Muhibbullah had some interest in Hindu philosophy but he could not develop it. However, one of his disciples Shaikh Muhammadi acquired deep knowledge in it, learning it from the Brahmins themselves.49 Rizvi quotes two

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41 This interaction was facilitated by the travels of the Nathpanthis into Central Asia.
42 Khwaja Khurd, *op.cit.*, fols. 81a.
45 Ahmad, *Intellectual History*, p. 33.
49 Ibid., p. 340.
lines of his to make us understand what he understood by his Islamic notion of peace:

We practiced “peace with all”, with every one,
Do us enmity and don’t hesitate.  

He is said to have irked no one’s enmity, and wrote letters to Dara Shikoh asking him to have peace with ‘all’, not just with Muslims, interpreting Rahmatul lil- Alamin as the chief characteristic of Prophet Muhammad. The spirit of democracy ran so high that he did not heed to Shahjahan’s royal invitation (read, order) nor did he call any of his disciples as disciples, but equal fellows.  

Mian Mir, the almost official Sufi saint of the time of Shah Jahan and Dara Shikoh, developed the concept of Namaz-i-bekhatra (prayer without dangers). He called the regular form of prayer, Namaz, as full with danger because people performed it without understanding the meaning behind.  

Even Shaikh Muhibullah recommended this form of Namaz to the Dara Shikoh. So, the external form of religion did not matter. There were two ways to achieve the way of God: Tariqat and Haqiqat. The former meant following the path of mysticism; the second directly put the follower into the essence of God.  

Each way further implied two different methods: Jazba, which meant divine grace, and Suluk, which meant doing ascetic exercises and hard thinking in isolation (meditation). The latter was perhaps a direct import from the yogic ascetics. When asked by Mulla Abdul Hakim Sialkoti, that suluk may deprive people of performing mass prayers on occasions such as Id, Miyan Mir

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50 Rizvi, Revivalist Movements, p. 340.
51 Ibid, p. 341.
53 Sakinat-ul auliya, cf. Rizvi, op. cit., p. 341. It is to be noted that any merger with God is not strictly possible in Islam, but only in Hinduism.
retorted that he saw no value in the traditional Namaz, whose performer was unaware of the meaning. Hence, the creation of Namaz-i-behatra, whose name derived from the precondition, the performer renounced all doubts and fears from his or her mind before doing it.54

Sarmad’s career, if one may call it so, ran parallel to that of his philosophical counterpart, Mujaddid. Both were highly cultivated (though in opposite trends), even if Sarmad’s knowledge was more from practical experiences. Both had connections with state power, though Sarmad with his high humanism and universalism came closer to Prince Dara Shikoh than Mujaddid could come to Aurangzeb. Sarmad was probably of Jewish origins, born in Kashan (Iran). He was highly learned in Hebrew and Jewish literature before taking up Christianity and finally studying under Mulla Sadruddin Shirazi, who was a highly accomplished independent thinker, and accepted Islam. He travelled to India,55 and learned about Buddhism and Hinduism which made him declare that he would never pilgrimage to Mecca since it would involve killing an innocent animal. After coming to Thatta, he fell in love with a young boy, and due to his failure became a wandering mystic. Later, however, the father of the boy condescended, and Sarmad introduced him to the world of philosophy and religion. After sojourning at Lahore and then Hyderabad, he finally moved on to Delhi where the Prince Dara Shikoh acquired his friendship (around 1654). In contemporary eyes of orthodoxy,

54 Slavoj Žižek, The Ticklish Subject, London, 1999, p. 211. How this philosophy would have conversed with the theology of the later centuries? In other words, were there elements of modernity in it? A reference to Kierkegaard may provide the answer: “Kierkegaard’s point is that true religion is simultaneously more ‘inner’ (it involves an act of absolute faith that cannot even be externalized into the universal medium of language) and more external (when I truly believe, I accept that the source of my faith is not in myself; that, in some inexplicable way, it comes from outside, from God Himself – in His grace, God addressed me, it was not I who raised myself to Him).”

both Sarmad and Dara Shikoh were lunatics. Bernier and Manucci too mention having seen him stark naked on the streets of Delhi.

Sarmad ruthlessly criticized the orthodox Muslim ways of praying and observing in his Rubais, which achieved a high popularity, not least because of its fine mix of youthful eroticism and mature philosophy. At once he is like Kabir, having been through every religion and denouncing each, and at one he is comparable to Omar Khayyam, in their common belief in the ephemeral nature of things. However, Sarmad composed many sharp verses:

He who understood the secrets of the Truth  
Became vaster than the vast heaven;  
Mulla says ‘Ahmad went to heaven’;  
Sarmad says ‘nay, heaven came down to Ahmad.’

If read in tune with Dara Shikoh’s denunciations of the orthodoxy, these verses attain a social power of their own. It is to underline the great warfare between humanistic universalism and narrow-minded bigotry of the victors, which we can quote the Prince himself:

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56 Sher Khan Lodi, Miratul-Khayal, Calcutta, 1831, p. 216.  
57 Bernier, Travels, p. 317; Manucci, Storia de Mogor, vol. 1, p. 223.  
60 Sarmad, Rubaiyat, p. 128. It strikes the reader that, in his critique of German Idealism, Karl Marx used more or less the same metaphor: “In direct contrast to German philosophy which descends from heaven to earth, here we ascend from earth to heaven. That is to say, we do not set out from what men say, imagine, conceive, nor from men as narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived, in order to arrive at men in the flesh. We set out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life-process we demonstrate the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process.” See, Karl Marx, The German Ideology, ed. C. J. Arthur, New York, 2004, p. 47.
Paradise is there where no Mulla abides,
Where there is no argument and tumult with him.
May the world become free from the noise of the Mulla!
May no one pay heed to his fatwa!
In the city where a Mulla resides,
No wise man is ever found.\(^6\)

Sarmad also says about Gods the following verses:

Talk not about the Kaba and the temple with every one,
And in the valley of doubt walk not like deviated ones.
Learn the form of worship from Satan himself!
Take only One as the object of worship; bend not before any other

[...]

He does not live only in the temple and the mosque,
But all the heavens and the earth are his abode.
The whole universe is gone mad about His name!
Yes, wise is one who is lost in him.\(^6\)

After the execution of Dara, Sarmad was tried a) for being naked; b) for not pronouncing the Kalma to full (he only said ‘la ilaha’ which meant ‘there was no God...’); c) for not believing in Muhammad’s ascension to heaven. Intellectually, Sarmad had responded quite movingly, yet not enough to convince the hell-bent Aurangzeb and his protégé Mulla Qavi. Hence, he was ordered to be executed in public. Just prior to the fall of the blade, Sarmad, after remarking that the Satan was ‘Qavi’ \(i.e.\) powerful who was unflinching, composed the followed verse:

\(^6\)Sarmad, *op.cit.*, p. 50.
There was uproar and we opened our eyes from the eternal Sleep,
Saw that the night of wickedness endured, so slept again.\textsuperscript{63}

It is to be noted that Islam has had to adjust itself according to time and
location, and it has interacted a lot with its neighbouring cultures. The very
number system that is used today internationally – the decimal system – was
borrowed by the Arabs after Islamicization from India. There used to be a
great deal of sea trade before and after the rise of Islam, with Arabia. Hence,
earliest civilizational interactions were quite strong. Even the first Muslims did
not come as invaders through Sind and Khyber; they came to South India.
Also, the typical Indian \textit{sanyasi} was, conventionally, the figure of a man who
had renounced the social order and wandered in the forests for achieving
mystical experiences and divine knowledge. When Sufism came to India, it
adopted this signification, and came to symbolise renunciation of state and
society. Also, for issues of livelihood, Sufism adopted a great deal from the
\textit{sanyasi} wanderer. Some Chisti Sufis even took to begging for food, just like
Hindu \textit{sanyasis} did. They became closely associated with the popular classes,
especially the peasantry and the poor classes, who sought divine aid in helping
matters which were caused mostly out of misery and backwardness. If
Kosambi conceived of the \textit{whole} of the Indian history as a gradual assimilation
of the tribal society into the Brahminical caste society, then the \textit{whole} of the
medieval Indian history could thus be conceived as a similar co-option of the
Sufi and saint system into the dynamics of state politics. Sufi silsilahs were
used, as Richard M. Eaton has repeatedly argued, for stabilizing hostile or
exterior populations into the fold of the Mughal empire.\textsuperscript{64} Even metaphors

to those present, it was quoted by Maulana Abaul Kalam Azad in his \textit{Al Hilal}
essay on Sarmad.

217-218.
used to make people understand one’s theological ideas were shared between Islam and Hinduism, as in case of *Tauhid-i-Wujud* and Nath-panthis, who used the concept of water and bubble to argue for the similarity in the Being and its Creation. Both Dara Shikoh and Mulla Daud recognised the Vedic literature as being at par with Quran in terms of divine origin and value.

This ideology was not confined to Delhi and the central places. In the provincial Punjab, a powerful egalitarian and humanitarian poetry and social thought was propounded by Bulleh Shah (1680-1758) who, following the zeitgeist of his times, amalgamated various lines and systems of thought - Islam, Vedant, Vaishnavism - into one syncrctic whole. Born as Saiyad family at Uch Gilaniyan, Bahawalpur in Punjab, he was trained in core Islamic studies by Khwaza Gulam Murtaza. However, he went on to study under Inayat Shah Qadirin, who included the experiences of Hindu sadhus in his *Dastur-i-Amal* as necessary for a seven-step spiritual journey. He composed most of his poetry in Punjabi language, criticising all other forms of love and devotion except the one to his own master, Inayat Khan. Central to his was a critique of the existing big religions:

\[
\text{Mullahan te mashaalchi, doha ne iko chit}
\]
\[
\text{Lokka ne kare chhanana, aap hanerevich}
\]

(The Mullah and the torchbearer are the same; they illuminate others while in darkness themselves).

However, he also described the political situation of his times:

\[
\text{Mugalan zeher piyale peete;}
\]
\[
\text{Bhuriyan wale raaje keete;}
\]

---

Shah ashraffiran chup keete;
Bhala unhan nu jhadiyana
Rahora hove ishqa da marya ne
Kaho kisnu par utariyan ne

(The Mughals have suffered a lot, while anarchists have been
made the king. All gentlemen are quiet, and are being ignored.
Hey love, you have depressed me. Whom have you raised?).

It was this Universalist sentiment which led him to condemn the murder
of Sikh youth at the hands of a Muslism mob in Pandoke. For this, he was
condemned by the clerics. However, he also criticized the attitude of those
Sikhs who wanted to revenge that killing by killing other Muslims. He also
upheld Guru Tegh Bahadur as ‘Ghazi’.

In the Indian subcontinent, there is virtually no record of any mass
conversion of non-Muslims to Islam via state repression, largely because the
Muslim state was not interested in converting the infidels, as long as it got its
land revenue out of the overwhelmingly peasant population, and more so
because of the cultural-historical reasons. This is rather surprising because,
from William Jones onwards, including Max Mueller and so on, there is
virtually no Western scholar who has not glamorized the “overwhelmingly
religious” or “spiritual” Indian way of life, especially in the countryside. This
is not to deny any spiritual experience to the commoners, rather, it is to
underline the class nature of such experience: elite politics looked upon itself
as belonging to the Islamic world (with exceptions like Amir Khusrau and
Akbar), with the Ulemas owning influence in theological matters, if not in
judicial or administrative; while at the popular level, religion was mostly a
means to cope with the harsh reality, or rather, a means to escape it. The

\[67\] Irfan Habib, “Medieval Popular Monotheism and Its Humanism: The
Historical Setting,” *Social Scientist*, vol. 21, No. 3-4, 1993, p. 80.
interaction between Sufism and Hinduism was thus, another arena of lower-class solidarity, however much off the target.

Between *saguna* and *nirguna* bhakti, the latter was the closest fusion of Islamic and Hindu religious philosophies: contra the idolatry inherent in the *saguna* bhakti, and also its reliance upon magic and incontestable mediacy of the teacher, the ‘guru’, the *nirguna* bhakti directly related the divine to the human. It also critiqued, as Kabir had done so courageously, the state religion (Islam) for its emphasis on following rituals and concretizing forms of worshipping. Overall, the emphasis of the *nirguna* bhakti was very much similar to the contemporary and faraway religious movement called Protestantism: like Protestantism, it declared the profane a part of the sacred, and eventually, the very ‘profane’ part of society (artisans, labourers, and peasants) was identified as the honourable part of society. There have been indications that the re-emergent *saguna* bhakti in the form of the new or remodelled gods like Krishna and Ram, so much remindful of the exploitative Brahminical systems of thought and practices, was the latter’s reimposition, as so many sects belonging to the lower castes and peasantry sprang up, including the Satnamis and the Dadupanthis. It is perhaps another growing indicator of the anti-hierarchical consciousness that the Darvesh-like figure of the Dadupanthi came to symbolise an anti-caste person.68 The Brahmins resorted to using scriptures to condemn their being, out of sync with these and called their teachings as false, while upholding their own as being the *shastras*.69 In other words, they criticized the heterodox sects for not being them.

Another development following the reassertion of *saguna* bhakti was the reclamation of the heterodox sects into the fold of Hinduism. In many aspects, it was remarkably similar to the assimilation of Buddhism and Jainism

into caste society just prior to the advent of Islam. Almost a millennium after Islam’s arrival, this re-absorption of heterodox elements into the Brahminical-caste society represented a big defeat, because this time state-power was not within the hands of the Brahmanas (via Kshatriays or Rajputs). However, the Muslims rulers paid no attention to the Brahminical hold over society (‘failures’ which were decried by Shah Wali Ullah and Sirhindi), and they even left it intact. On the one hand, non-interference in others’ religious affairs was a welcome move, by Akbar and Jahangir, and post-Aurangzeb. However, to leave the caste-system intact proved counterpart since it gave South Asian Islam it’s distinctively (negative) feature: it got ‘Hinduized’ not by adopting colourful manners or customs from Hinduism but by adopting the caste-system that laid within. Even today, Muslims in many parts of the country practices a form of endogamy which is deeply motivated by caste-like consciousness. More so, occupational differences too are determined by caste among Muslims. It was this non-support to heterodox sects by state-power which ultimately paved the way for their re-absorption into Hinduism. A circle, which began with the liberation of anti-caste ideologies from under the Rajput states, had come a full circle. The result was further sectarianisation and casteification of denominational groups, like Dadu-panthis and Sikhs. From Dabistan-i-Majahib, we note the usage of certain labels and names like ‘Dadupanthis’ and ‘Kabirpanthis’, ‘Vairagis’ etc. However, these names do not denote sectarian outfits or certain discrete organizations, like the various satsang sects we find today. They merely denoted a certain way of thinking, an ideological affiliation. The individual could belong to communities other than his religious community, although people were most often organized around occupation and caste categories. In the early part of the seventeenth century, the nostalgia for the nirguna saints was thus countered by Brahminism, which

70Rameshwar Prasad Bahuguna, Conflict And Assimilation In Medieval North Indian Bhakti: An Alternative Approach, SAP-History Monograph- 6, New Delhi, p. 28.
placed restrictions upon its followers to interact with them, or by disallowing them from interacting with the Muslims.\textsuperscript{71} These measures gained momentum as the Mughal authority loosened grip, and as it became more and more sectarian under Aurangzeb. Still, a lot of people were mobilized by the anti-caste ideologies, following the relatively new Bhakti-sant tradition, and Brahminism had to work extra hard to get these people back into its fold.\textsuperscript{72}

It has been observed that the Bhakti movement in the person of Ramananda (15\textsuperscript{th} c.) got divided into conservative and radical fractions in the coming centuries: Kabir, Dadu or Rajjab represented the most radical trends amongst these. In the seventeenth century, these trends either consolidated themselves or got reorganized, as was done by Jagjivandas. Further inroads were made into unifyng the previously perceived alien traditions. The shrine of Baba Farid at Pakpattan served as the site of tacit alliance between political power and local syncretism, between imperial consolidation and religion-inspired welfarism. However, in the seventeenth century this alliance between political power and syncretism not only consolidated further, it also became nearly all-pervasive. When Islam and the Hindu religions came down to the popular level, they found miniscule difference between themselves – something that was neither the beginning nor the end of a process but that surely had a lot of theoretical and practical interaction before. Even Aziz Ahmad is forced to quip that the \textit{ulema} of the period was undergoing a rather ‘liberal’ phase. Two people from the royal family, one of them an Emperor, were closely attached to the syncretic, universalistic movements in the seventeenth century, and its immediate aftermath.


\textsuperscript{72}Bahuguna, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 35.
One of the foremost saints among the seventeenth century was Birbhan, who was active in the region of today’s Haryana. The guru (leading up to Raidas) as a mediator was present in the order that he founded with the name of Satnam, which was in itself based upon an uncompromising monotheism – again a borrowing common to Hinduism and Islam. Similarities with Sikhism are a bound, as the former too had a holy book (Pothi) in the local dialects. The followers were called as ‘Sadh’, who were not discriminated by caste. Endogamy was practiced within the sect, which rendered it a rather closed organization. The philosophy of the sect was commonsensical and anti-superstition, anti-ritualistic. It had a minimalistic attitude to life. The sect even rebelled against the Mughal empire under Aurangzeb. The sect was revived by Jagjivan Das, who was an upper-caste follower of Kabir, who derived his disciples from across castes and religions. His idea was that God was beyond human limitations, hence, free from the cycle of birth or reducible to idolatry.

It was however, Baba Lal, who is of considerable interest as he had as one of his disciples Dara Shikoh himself, the chosen prince of Shahjahan. He had a monastery and a temple built at Sirhind, from where the other theologian called Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi came. Dara Shikoh had a profound debate about the nature of God and universe, which is contained in the book *Nadir-un-Nukat*, in the form of dialogues. Curiously, Baba Lal placed love at the centre of his theology, much like Christianity. Indeed, absence or even prohibition of idolatry marked many of the medieval Hindu sects, along with an emphasis on the universal brotherhood and equality of men. The only way they were different from the eighteenth century France was that their notions did not translate into political or material equality; rather they came to emphasize only spiritual equality. What was true of Baba Lal was thus true of Laldas, Hariram Puri, Laldas, Mihirchand, Binavali, etc.
If Dara Shikoh came in touch with Baba Lal, then another Hindu, Raja of Panna came in touch with Pran Nath, who founded the Dharni group. It is said that the closeness developed due to the latter’s discovery of diamond mine, which gets reflected probably in the name of the king (‘panna’ also means a jewel stone). However, it was the theology which Pran Nath had worked out which seems more interesting: like Dara Shikoh, he came to the conclusion that Quran and Vedas had the same message, and one text could and should be used to understand the other. He narrates the history of prophets, in which Jesus and Mohammad and a host of other quasi-mythological people are traced, and then he declares the arrival of one final prophet. Tara Chand quotes a few lines from his Dabistan Tulsidas belonged to the conservative school arising out of Ramanand’s thought.

Thus, we find a whole set of Sufis - the Gurzmar sect, an offshoot of the Junaidi order - inflicting mace wounds upon themselves. The Mastanas of the Gujarat used intoxications to get into ecstasy. The vicinity of the vamamargi cannot be ruled out. *Dabistan-i-Majahib* mentions two Hindu fakirs used to eating cow’s flesh, while also carrying the caste-marks on forehead and the ‘zunar’, the caste-thread for upper-classes.\(^7\) When captured by Hindus, they responded that both the cow-flesh and the thread ultimately came from the four elements earth, water, fire and space. The Chisti saints would collect food from the people just like Hindu saints would do, in a certain defiance of the Islamic principles. The Binawa and the Nawshahi orders, heterodox versions of the Qadiriya Sufism, would even mix music and dancing with the formal-ritual processes of Islam.\(^8\) The Qalandar Sufis too adopted a lot of practices from their Hindu counterparts, with Sarmad, the wanderer-mystic friend of Dara Shikoh, even went out completely naked like Naga Sadhus. Similarly, a lot of Muslims (mostly Shias) used to tie amulets with a blessing or a couplet

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\(^7\) *Dabistan-i-Majahib*, p. 230.
\(^8\) Ahmad, *Intellectual History*, p. 45.
from Quran into their necks. Almost all the saints were thought to be possessed with magic and healing powers, proper services and love to whom would result in one’s desires being fulfilled. One such practice was *jhaad foonk*, which involved chanting of Quranic verses in the same manner as Hindu mantras, to ward off evil spirits.\(^{75}\) Similarly, the cult of animal sacrifice also entered Islamic culture.

In *Tazkira Pir Hassu Teli*, there is a mention of the ‘Muslim’ saint Pir Hassu Teli born in 16th century and living for a considerable time into the seventeenth century, around the Chenab river in the family of the Telis (oilmen – one of the Muslim castes). After he met one representative of the nine Naths of belonging to the sect of Gorakhnath, his ideas and way of life changed completely. Although he never converted, he was seen not observing the five tenets of Islam. On being questioned, his hagiographer Surat Singh, himself a Brahmin by caste, replied: “He prayed all the time, so why should he have prayed in public? Why should he have paid *zakat*, or kept daily fasts when he never had anything stored up, or never broke his fast? Why should he have gone to Hajj, to go around the Kaba, when he went round the Kaba of his heart a hundred times in one breath.”\(^{76}\) The *Tazkira* provides us other insights, and transposes the legend of the aftermath of Kabir’s death (when his body turned into flowers distributed among his Hindu and Muslims flowers) to Guru Nanak in Punjab. This shows that a syncretic religion of Hindus and Muslims like Sikhism has wider acceptability in Punjab than among its core supporters. *Tazkira* also mentions several, possibly imaginary, encounters of the author with Guru Nanak in various personae.

\(^{75}\)Ahmad, *Intellectual History*, p. 48.
Once, Surat Singh was performing the tawaf of the burial of his mentor, Hassu Teli. He is questioned by a passerby on his performance, and then he is told somewhat contemptuously that his rituals of circumambulation were without basis. The passerby began to recite various couplets in Hindi, and in his mysterious eyes Surat Singh saw Guru Nanak. However, he is immediately reminded by his mentor, Hassu Teli, that the reciter was not Guru Nanak but he himself. Hassu Teli becomes synonymous with all great spirits and saints, in the view of his disciple, and thus a non-sectarian religious idea gets inscribed into the mind of a high-placed official as Surat Singh.\textsuperscript{77} It also corroborates with the fact of the organizational functioning of the Satnamis or Kabirpanthis, who had not yet learned of sectarian belonging.

Another, strange yet important information is provided by the accounts of Mohammad Balkhi, who travelled from Central Asia to India, hoping to see the beautiful Indian women throughout his travels. He made some interesting journeys and introductions. Once, he got to travel from Allahabad to Banaras, joined by sanyasis probably belonging to the Vairagi sect. The kind of homophony employed by Dara Shikoh mentions in Majma-ul-Bahrain to denote similarities in the theological objects of Hindus and Muslisms, we also get to see in popular usage in Dabistan, where the author notes that some Muslims deliberately confused Bishnu (Vishnu) with Bismillah.\textsuperscript{78} When Balkhi was with his fellow travellers, he questions for abandoning Islam and joining the Hindus, he was replied to by being pointed out to the sky with their

\textsuperscript{77} J.S. Grewal and Irfan Habib (eds.), \textit{Sikh History from Persian Sources}, Proceedings of Indian History Congress, 2001, p. 86.

\textsuperscript{78}Dabistan-i-Majahib, pp. 262-263. It reads “They make pilgrimages to the holy places dedicated to Vichnu, and wear around their necks rosaries of tulasi, which they call mali-tulasi. Tulasi is an Indian shrub. Whoever among the Hindus, Muselmans, or others, wishes, is received into their religion; none are rejected, but, on the contrary, all are invited. It is said that some Muselmans also worship Vichnu, because in “Bismilla” they confound Bisem with Bishen. (or Vichnu).”
fingers on their foreheads. By this gesture, I understood that they attributed it to Providence and fate,” remarks Balkhi. In another case, when Balkhi visited Mathura, he saw Hindus taking mass-bathing in the river Yamuna, and along with them, several beautiful Hindu women. He remarks that he felt like converting into their religion on seeing their beauty. In contrast to the attitude of the religious conservatives and patriarchs who blamed the women for enticing them to *sway away* from the religion, here the women is enticing one into *following* the religion. Following his overwhelming desire to observe Hindu women, Balkhi also travelled to Jagannath. He wrote:

> In short, seeing their assemblage [at Mathura], my desire also became intense, since I had undertaken the entire travel with the object of observing God’s wonders. On account of my desire, I had been inclined to join them for visiting that place. Now I resolved firmly to visit it (Jagannath). During the night when the caravan of the Hindus began to move forward I also joined the concourse reciting ‘Hari-bol’ with head and feet bare, and travelled with them entertaining myself with strange sights…

> [T]he Hindus observe some regulations there. First, the Muslims are not allowed to enter. Since, at that time I had absolutely concealed my identity, the guards and doorkeepers did not object to my entrance, and permitted me to enter. With awakened heart and open eyes, I enjoyed the sight of that place. I observed the building and whatever I had spent on journey I regained there.81

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80Husain, “Hindu Shrines”, pp. 148-49. For Balkhi it was “Such a sense-enticing sight is obtained that one might lose the rein of Islam and become followers of the Hindus!”
We learn from this passage that the Hindus reserved their religious places exclusively for people of their own religion, and yet a Central Asian traveller, who might have been so different in physical appearance, could visit and enjoy the religious gathering, in all senses of the term.

In this context, the pitting of Dara Shikoh and Aurangzeb has inflated their personal rivalry for power into two different philosophies for the continuance of Empire. Dara Shikoh was born in 1615, and he was apparently born to Shah Jahan after he prayed at Khwaja Muinuddin Chisti for a son, following three daughters. Dara Shikoh had a prodigious interest in religious affairs, while he was taught by Mir Abdul latif Sultan. He learned, like other Mughal princes, the Quran, Hadis and Persian literature, but he came in touch with the Sufis, above all Miyan Mir (d. 1635) and Mulla Shah Bakshi (d. 1661), who introduced him to the Hindu philosophies. He also came in close connection with Shah Muhibullah Shah Dilruba, Shah Muhammad Lisanullah, Baba Lal Das Bairagi, some Kabir panthis and Jagannath Mishra – were among his friends. He came in touch with *wujudi* ideas and furthered them beyond limits. His friendship transcended religion, class and linguistic boundaries. He learned Sanskrit too, from Brahmins, and studied *Upanishads*, *Yogvashishtha* and the *Bhagvad Gita* at Banaras. The details of some of his works are as follows. Manucci describes him as “a man of dignified manners, of a comely countenance, joyous and polite in conversation, ready and gracious of speech, of most extraordinary liberality, kindly and compassionate, but overconfident in his opinion of himself, considering himself competent in all things and having no need of advisers... Thus his dearest friends never ventured to inform him of the most essential things.”\(^{82}\) He further describes him as thus:

\(^{82}\)Manucci, *op. cit.*, p. 221.
Dara was very fond of Europeans. Added to this, as everyone knew, he held to no religion. When with Mahomedans, he praised the tenets of Muhammad; when with Jews, the Jewish religion; in the same way, when with Hindus, he praised Hinduism. This is why Aurangzeb styled him Cafar (Kafir) — that is to say, ‘The Infidel’. At the same time he had great delight in talking to the Jesuit fathers on religion, and making them dispute with his learned Mahomedans, or with a Hebrew called Cermad (Sarmad), an atheist much liked by the Prince.  

_Safinatul Auliya_ was his first work (finished in 1640), dedicated to Mullah Abdurrahman Jami (d. 1492), wherein he discusses about Prophet Muhammad, the Four Caliphs, the Twelve Imams and various Sufis, which included the Qadiris, Naqshbandis, Chistis, Kubarawi and Suhrawardis. Despite himself belonging to the Qadiris, he also mentions a few relatively unknown Sufis. He does not seem to have included unverified information in his biographical accounts. Dara mentions that he got an incurable disease at the age of 21, and then Shah Jahan took him to get the blessings of Miyan Mir. Mir gave him a cup of water with his blessings and Dara got cured magically. This, incident implies a royal belief in magic or shamanism.

_Sakinatul Auliya_ was composed three years after _Safinatul Auliya_, which mentions about Miyan Mir and his disciples in great detail. Divided into three parts, the book narrates biographical facts about Miyan Mir in the first, and his relation to Jahangir and Shah Jahan. The second part mentions the magical qualities of Miyan Mir’s sister Bibi Jamal Khatoon, and the third mentions contemporary and other Sufis.

_Hasnaatul Arifin_, written in 1654, describes his growing affinity to monotheistic perspectives after the age of 38. Hence, he compiled views of

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83Manucci, _op. cit._, p. 223.
monotheistic Sufis alone in this work. He was vehemently opposed by the *ulema* for his relations to the Sufis, so he harshly criticized them back in this work, affirming that heaven and intelligence could only be there where there was no one from *ulema*. *Risalaa-i-Hak Numa* was composed in 1646, written primarily for ordinary people, explaining to them, in a layman’s style, the ideas of Sufis and their importance. It is based on *Futuhatul-Makkiya* and *Fususul-Hikam* by Ibn-i-Arabi.

*Tariqatwa Haqiqat* (1653) makes a distinction between two paths towards divinity: one, that of reason and rationality based on facts; the other, that of ecstasy and mysticism achieved through various devotional practices. In Dara Shikoh’s views, the latter was better since reason could be sublated within the madness of contact with divinity.

After 1653, he studied non-Muslim philosophical works heavily, and finally wrote the grandiloquently entitled *Majmaul-Baharain* (The Meeting of Oceans), in 1655. This metaphor suggests that Islam and Hinduism were as similar as the water of two oceans, suggesting a very high degree of compatibility. Quran and Upanishads were paths to the same god, remarkably similar in content. He also argued for an equally respectable basis for Upanishad as the Quran, since the former was also a ‘word of God’. Since, he was aware that most people would regard his ideas as perverse, so he took special care to limit the text for his inner circle. However, he nowhere suggested that he abandoned Islam, and yet managed to unify it to the Hindu philosophies. He even mentions micro-level similarities between Hindu and Sufi practices, like the phonetic equivalence of ‘Umanam’ and ‘Hu Allah’.

It could also be said that in doing so he was following a tradition which stretched many centuries back - that of finding equivalences in Islam and Hinduism by

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twisting language - one whose pioneer was Mulla Daud of the fourteenth century, who wrote Quran as Puran, and also considered Vedas as divine works.85

After the grandiloquent manifestation of his desire to bring the two religions conceptually closer, there came a highly accomplished, detailed study of Upanishads, entitled Sirr-i-Akbar, or Sirr-ul-Asrar. It contains highly polished translations of the most complicated Sanskrit texts into Persian. He concluded that Hinduism did not oppose monotheism, rather, it had room for both monotheism and polytheism. Hence, he focused on the monotheistic philosophical aspects in Upanishads. He was helped by Brahmins from Banaras. He claimed that the difficulties he faced in studying the books of his religion i.e. Islam were easily solved by reading this ancient works of Hindi [sic] philosophy. He went on to claim that he did not find a single line opposable to the message and spirit of Quran. He mentions his conversations with Baba Lal. He wanted to submit himself into the services of Baba Lal, but as soon as Baba Lal got to know this, he himself appeared in Lahore, probably while Dara was returning from Qandahar (1651). He also translated Yoga Vashishtha into Persian around 1655, with the story that both Vashishtha and Rama visited him in his dreams, and hence he got the inspiration to translate the text. Tareekh-e-Shamscher Khani renders Firdausi’s Shahnama in abridged form.

It is worth mentioning that, after he was finally defeated by the alliance forces led by Aurangzeb and Murad, when he was brought in chains to Delhi, he was humiliated by parading on an elephant. While he suffered, the people of Delhi wept and cried to see the fate of their dear prince. He was a cherished boy among the lowest classes, among the wanderers and mystics. Anyone who

possessed an iota of mysticism and philosophy was his friend. Like people of his kind, he rather seems uninterested in matters of administration and ruling his people, for people were his friends and friends cannot be ruled. Probably, this was the cause of his tragic demise. It was the fear of his high popularity among ordinary people that Aurangzeb had him murdered, along with his mystic associates, for the alleged reason of not posing threat to his contending for kingship but for threatening the faith of Islam. Dara’s death was, beyond doubt, a great loss for the syncretic practices. He was the man who was described by Manucci to be known by everyone to have no religion. First of all, it must be said that Aurangzeb was highly pious in his private life. Manucci describes as being “moderately liberal, distributing awards and conferring gifts wherever suitable.”

Hindu ideas and thoughts had no place in his life, even if he paid visits to many a pantheistic Sufis. Despite his high reverence to Islam, and an antagonistic attitude to un-Islamic things, Aurangzeb patronised many temples while he destroyed many others. This seemingly strange attitude is not explicable due to his personal beliefs or hatred for the other. His policy towards non-Muslims was that of domination, and he would take extreme steps if they did not submit to his authority. Having said this, it also needs to be taken into account that once a non-Hindu would submit to him politically, his private beliefs were not questioned. Political subservience was all that was needed. If that did not happen, the Emperor would not hesitate to eradicate the antagonism. He even offered Shivaji, his arch-enemy, his subservience for 5000 Jat. However, Shivaji refused because he did not consider this small level of mansabdari up to his level. Further, while Aurangzeb was on his way to defeat Dara Shikuh, he paid visit to a wujudi saint at Banaras, so much so that he was refused meeting by the non-discriminatory saint. Aurangzeb had to bribe his servants to persuade him to bless him, whom he wanted to see sincerely.

86Manucci, op. cit., p. 248.
Aurangzeb, the *zinda pir*, is reported to have cited rather spontaneously a verse written by Guru Nanak, running as follows:

*Tupi lende bawri dende, gahare nilaj,
Chuha khada mawli tu kal bandhe chhaj.*

(Mad are those who bestow praises and honor (on the undeserving) and very shameless are those people who accept (such praise or honor). The rat cannot fit into the hole, yet it has tide a winnowing basket to its waist with the assurance of carrying it into the hole).

This fact proves that Aurangzeb was well-versed with the common parlance on the time, with his mother-tongue too being reported a version of Khari-boli. So, even an emperor hostile to non-Islamic traditions possessed the cultural values of the same. Another fact is pointed by Satish Chandra: Aurangzeb had more numbers of Hindus in the services than Shah Jahan’s 33 percent in 1689. He granted land to various temples, like the Krishna temples at Mathura and others at Thatta. Satish Chandra argues convincingly that these grants were a *quid pro quo* with the local actors to not to trouble the empire-building plans of his. Jizyah too was reinstated in the 22nd regnal year of Aurangzeb, in 1679. Dara Shikoh failed to mobilize the crucial support of the Rajputs, while for Aurangzeb it was a big success.

Aurangzeb also attempted to proselytize people in Islam. Having failed at convincing a Rajput prince for long, he challenged him to hold a red hot iron rod if his religion was true. The Prince accepted, but as soon as he began to hold the iron rod, he threw it off involuntarily towards the King’s tent.

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90 Chandra, “Reassessing Aurangzeb”, p. 156.
which got burned. After that, he remarked that probably both of them lived in error.⁹¹

**Festivals, Belief systems, Superstitions**

The common people learned from each other’s religions and adopted each other’s practices. The use of amulets and magic, an effect of Hindu culture, has been noted. In addition, Muslim women in Lucknow would consume water exposed to moonlight to cure their childbirth complications - a practice learned from their Hindu counterparts.⁹² A sample of earth taken from the Sufi saint’s tomb was considered spirit-defying and curing. Solar eclipse was regarded as having a particularly bad effect upon pregnant women, and they had to stay away from it.⁹³ Several things in the Muharram procession were regarded as those of Hindu origins. There were saints with particular properties, like Sadar Pir who would protect people from floods or drought. Most of those who converted from Hinduism to Islam retained their daily beliefs and practices, including some of the Gods and images from Hinduism. *Hawwa* was a demonic spirit which was regarded as that of the Emperor Humayun. Several Hindu ghosts got transferred to Muslims, like *Chudail*.⁹⁴ Astrology was widely prevalent, and across classes: even Emperor Jahangir consulted the astrologers almost every moment. The number thirteen was considered inauspicious and the date was regarded so too.

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⁹¹Manucci, p. 231.
⁹³Crooke, *Religion and Folklore*, p. 41.
The Hindus of the seventeenth century northern India used to observe a plethora of festivals in different parts of the year. They were known for their zeal and enthusiasm pertaining to these ancient festivals that had run for centuries which led to the strengthening of the intra-community bonds. Quite a number of these festivals were based on two of the greatest epics of Hindus-Ramayan and Mahabharata, which modulated most part of their religious lives. Some of the important deities include Ram, Lakshman, Sita, Radhakrishan, Hanuman etc. Besides this, Shiva, Vishnu, Ganesha and goddesses like Durga, Kali, Chandi and Ganga too would be worshipped. The unifying factor of these festivals was that there was no caste, class divide. Amongst elites and masses alike, Basant Panchami, Holi, Diwali and Dusshera were celebrated with fervor.

Holi was a major festival which would coincide with the onset of spring and was replete with colour, music, dance and feast. Abir, the coloured powder and Gulal were integral part of the celebrations. Akbar, being a liberal emperor also showed great enthusiasm in Holi and he himself used to indulge in celebrations. He gave freedom to his subjects and officers to celebrate Holi in his darbar and exchanged colour, sweets and robes to mark the specialty of the occasion. Jahangir, like his multi-denominationalist king father, continued this tradition and even extended it to other festivals. In the seventh year of his rule, he celebrated rakshabandhan and got rakhi tied by the Hindu Amirs and Brahmins\(^5\). The Hindu festival of Dussehra was also celebrated by him with the display of armed forces a band of specially decorated elephants and horses\(^6\). Also known as Vijaydashmi, Dusshera has a special significance for Kshatriyas\(^7\). Since it commemorates the war between the Good (Rama) and the Evil (Ravana), it was considered to be an auspicious day for undertaking

\(^{5}\)Jahangir, Tujuk-i-Jahangir, p. 243.
\(^{6}\)Ibid., p. 23.
any military operation. Jahangir described the festival held on 24th of Mehr (1619) as: “After the custom of India, they decorated the horses and produced them before me. After I had seen the horses, they brought some of the elephants”.  

Diwali, meaning a row of lamps is observed on 15th day of the first half of the Hindu month of Kartika. Cleaning and Whitewashing of houses are done to mark the anticipated arrival of Lakshmi- the goddess of wealth, in homes, followed by illumination and sweet exchanges. Akbar was a keen observer of Diwali celebrations; so was Jahangir, who would prefer gambling, including his officers and attendants, which would go on for successive days. Govardhan Puja followed Diwali. On this day cows and cattles were washed, ornamented and worshipped. Akbar too participated in this ceremony several times.

The festivals, in caste-ridden society were divided according to Varnas. Jahangir observes and told main celebrators of Rakhi, Vijayadashmi, Diwali and Holi with extra heartiness but in no way it was exclusively celebrated by them associated with the Vaisyas. But it is totally wrong to associate the festival of Rakhi and Holi with the Brahmanas and Sudra respectively. It is difficult to ascertain the cause for associating Rakhi with Brahmanas and in case of Holi, perhaps Jahangir got misled by seeing the people of lower class playing holy with mud, ash and dust. These people were unable to buy expensive colour dyes. The more well off might enjoyed holy with colourful dyes. The

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100 Ibid., pp. 185-86.
102 Jahangir, *Tujuk-i-Jahangir*, p. 244.
The grandeur of celebration of *Snana* i.e. Holy Bath might be so impressive that it may breaks the misconception we receive from readings the court chronicles. As they find it something unique in it, perhaps, due to being a part of surroundings that do not catch attention. Simultaneously, for court chronicles activities of masses do not become a subject of any administrative attention. Here is a case of holy bath/*Snana* in Mathura described by Balkhi: “at last I reached the unique place of worship of the Hindus know as Matura (Mathura). Matura in fact is the name of the tenth *avatar* of the Hindus, who is also called Kishan.”\(^{103}\) Despite being cited Krishan as ‘false’(God) as he may think it as it was not his religion so can denounced as belief of others, Balkhi seems impressed of a huge temple tells the height as high as 100 yards having a big idol of Krishana made of black stone six yards tall and four yards in breadth.\(^{104}\)

Id-ul-Azha or Id-i-Qurban (sacrificial feast) is an important Muslim festival celebrated on 10th of Zul-hizza, the 12th month of the Musalman year. On this day devotees take bath, wear dress, and go to Id-gah, the designated place of prayer, where they pray in unison repeating the creed (takbir) all the way from their houses. After that the rite of sacrifice (Qurbani) is performed\(^{105}\). Shahjahan was very particular in this respect and used to sacrifice animals every year\(^{106}\). Id-ul-Fitr, the festival of breaking of the fast is another important festival of the Muslims, which is observed on first of Shawwal, the 10th Arabic month, after the long-drawn fast of the whole month of Ramzan. This festival is purely religious and is believed to be initiated by the Prophet in the second year of Hijra era. The festival is of rejoicing and thanks giving after the rigor of Ramzan. The appearance of moon of Id (Hilala-i-id) is a signal for

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\(^{103}\) Husain, “Hindu Shrines”, p. 145.  
relief and rejoices. The manner of celebrating this festival is almost the same as id-ul-Azha, the difference being that alms are given bounteously in place of sacrifice, and hence it is also called Id-ul-Sadaka (of Alms).

The Muslim year begins with Muharram. It marks the anniversary of the martyrdom of Hussain at Karbala. It is a month of mourning for the Muslims, especially Shias. Sunnis, generally keep away from Muharram, since they regard it as heresy and innovation (bid’at). Aurangzeb had in fact banned the celebration of Muharram during his rule. The feelings between Shias and Sunnis during the festival remain high. Where there was no Shia-Sunni question, the Hindus were made the victims as the murderers of Imaam Hussain. There was general tension between the various parties of Muharram zealots. “If two parties meet carrying their biers (tazias), and one will not give place to the other, then if they were evenly matched, they may kill each other as if they were enemies at open war”. On the last day of the festival funeral pyres are established and burnt in succession. People jump and walk over it and scatter the ashes with their feet and shout ‘Hasan Hussain’ with wild, savage cries. Balkhi, however, provides yet another amazing source of a shared culture: his account of Muharram in Lahore shows how deeply the Hindus were involved in the celebration of this festival, which was divided into 5 days each of joy and sorrow. On the first five days, “young Khattris’ wore the dress of Khattri women and leaving their homes spent the whole day ‘shamelessly’ in pleasure. During the next five days mourning was observed with black dresses being worn. On the 10th Muharram, ‘all the Shias and all Hindus close to the doors of their houses and shops, and conceal

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110 Thevenot, op. cit., p. 106.
111 Peter Mundy, op. cit., p. 219.
112 Zahiruddin Faruki, Aurangzeb and His Times, Delhi, 1972, p. 535.
113 Monserrate, op. cit. p. 22

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themselves inside like bats.”¹¹⁴ Later on, it is reported that some 50 Shias and 25 Hindus are killed in a dispute owing no known origin.¹¹⁵

These amalgamations were not isolated incidents of social harmony and ideological intercourse. They were the universal bearers of the signs of the times. The seventeenth century in Indian history remains remarkable because of the proliferation of innumerable heterodox ideas, ably supported and developed in the background of people like Kabir and Dadu.

¹¹⁴ Muhammad Balkhi as quoted by Husain, “Hindu Shrines”, p. 144.
¹¹⁵ Husain, “Hindu Shrines”, p. 144.