

Muslim Sufis and Their Concept of Social Service (Part-II)*

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In due course of time Bayazid Bistamis mother sent him to school. He learned the Quran, and one day his master was explaining the meaning of the verse of the Sura-al-Luqman, "Be thankful to Me, and to thy parents". These words moved the heart of Abu Yazid. "Sir," he said, laying down his tablet, "please give me permission to go home and say something to my mother." The master gave him leave, and Abu Yazid went home. "Why, Taifur," cried his mother, "why have you come home? Did they give you a present, or is it some special occasion?"

"No," Abu Yazid replied. "I reached the verse where God commands me to serve Him and you. I cannot be Abu Yazid al-Bustami, manager in two houses at once. This verse stung me to the quick. Either you ask for me from God, so that I may be yours entirely, or apprentice me to God, so that I may dwell wholly with Him."

"My son, I resign you to God, and exempt you from your duty to me," said his mother. "Go and be God's." "The task I supposed to be the hindmost of all tasks proved to be the foremost," Abu Yazid later recalled. "That was to please my mother. In pleasing my mother, I attained all that I sought in my many acts of self-discipline and service. It fell out as follows. One night my mother asked me for water. I went to fetch her some, but there was none in the jug. I fetched the pitcher, but none was in it either. So I went down to the river and filled the pitcher with water. When I returned to the house, my mother had fallen asleep.

"The night was cold. I kept the jug in my hand. When my mother awoke from sleep she drank some water and blessed me. Then she noticed that the jug was frozen to my hand. 'Why did you not lay the jug aside?' she exclaimed. 'I was afraid that you might wake when I was not present,' I answered. 'Keep the door half-open,' my mother then said. "I watched till near daybreak to make sure if the door was properly half-open or not, and that I should not have disregarded her command. At the hour of dawn, that which I had sought so many times entered by the door."

After his mother resigned him to God, Abu Yazid left Bestam and for thirty years wandered from land to land, disciplining himself with continuous vigil and hunger. He attended one hundred and thirteen spiritual preceptors

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and derived benefit from them all. Amongst them was one called Sadiq. He was sitting at his feet when the master suddenly said, "Abu Yazid, fetch me that book from the window." "The window? Which window?" asked Abu Yazid. "Why," said the master, "you have been coming here all this time, and you have not seen the window?" "No," replied Abu Yazid. "What have I to do with the; window? When I am before you, I close my eyes to everything else. I have not come to stare about." "Since that is so," said the teacher, "go back to Bestam. Your work is completed."

It was hinted to Abu Yazid that in a certain place a great teacher was to be found. He came from afar to see him. As he approached, he saw the reputed teacher spit in the direction of Mecca. He at once retraced his steps. "If he had achieved anything at all in the way," he remarked, "he would never have been guilty of transgressing the Law."⁴⁰

Abu Yazid often wandered about amongst the tombs. One night he was returning from the cemetery when a young nobleman approached playing a lute. "God save us," Abu Yazid exclaimed. The youth lifted the lute and dashed it against Abu Yazid's head, breaking both his head and the lute. The youth was drunk, and did not realize whom he was striking. Abu Yazid returned to his convent and waited till morning. Then he summoned one of his companions. "What do people give for a lute?" he asked him. The companion informed him. He wrapped the sum in a cloth, added a piece of sweetmeat, and sent these to the youth. "Tell the young gentleman," he said, "that Abu Yazid asks his pardon. Say to him, 'Last night you struck me with that lute and it broke. Accept this money in compensation, and buy another. The sweetmeat to remove from your heart the sorrow over the lute's being broken.'" "When the young nobleman realized what he had done, he came to Abu Yazid and apologized. He repented, and many young men repented along with him."⁴¹

In Abu Yazid's neighbourhood there lived a Zoroastrian. He had a child, and this child used to weep because they had no lamp. Abu Yazid with his own hand brought a lamp to their house. The child was hushed at once. "Since Abu Yazid's light has entered," they said, "it would be a pity for us to continue in our own darkness." They became Muslims forthwith.

One night Abu Yazid could find no joy in worship. "Look and see if there is anything of value in the house," he said. His disciples looked, and discovered half a bunch of grapes. "Fetch them and give them away," Abu Yazid commanded. "My house is not a fruiterer's shop." And he rediscovered his composure."⁴²

Ahmad-i-Harb had for neighbour a Zoroastrian named Bahram. Now this neighbour had sent a partner out on a trading mission, and on the way

thieves had carried off all his goods. "Rise up," Ahmad called to his disciples when he heard the news. "Such a thing has happened to our neighbour. Let us go and condole him. Even though he is a Zoroastrian, yet he is a neighbour." When they reached the door of his house Bahram was kindling his Zoroastrian fire. He ran forward and kissed his sleeve. Bahram, thinking that perhaps they were hungry, though bread was scarce made to lay the table. "Do not trouble yourself," Ahmad said. "We have come to sympathize. I heard that your goods had been stolen."

Hatem the Deaf's charity was so great that when a woman came to him one day to ask him a question and at that moment she broke wind, he said to her, "Speak louder. I am hard of hearing." This he said in order that the woman should not be put to shame. She raised her voice, and he answered her problem. So long as that old woman was alive, for close on fifteen years Hatem made out that he was deaf, so that no one should tell the old woman that he was not so. After her death he gave his answers readily. Until then, he would say to everyone who spoke to him, "Speak louder." That was why he was called Hatem the Deaf.⁴³

One day Ma'ruf was walking along with a group of his followers when a gang of youths came that way. They behaved outrageously all the way to the Tigris. "Master," Ma'ruf's companions entreated him, "pray to Almighty God to drown them all, that the world may be rid of their foul presence."

"Lift up your hands," Ma'ruf bade them. Then he prayed. "O God, as Thou hast given them a happy life in this world, even so grant them a happy life in the world to come." "Master, we know not the secret of this prayer," said his companions in astonishment. "He with whom I am speaking knows the secret," Ma'ruf replied. "Wait a moment. Even now this secret will be revealed." When the youths beheld the Shaikh, they broke their lutes and poured away the wine they were drinking.

Trembling overcame them, and they fell before the Shaikh and repented. "You see," Ma'ruf remarked to his companions. "Your desire has been fulfilled completely, without drowning and without anyone suffering."

The contribution of the Indian Sufis to society lies in their sincere and dedicated struggle to find a unity for the heterogeneous elements. Shaikh Nizam-u'd-din Auliya often cited in his assemblies a remark of Shaikh Abu Sa'id Abul Khair) that though there were myriads of routes and roads leading to God, none was quicker and more effective than bringing happiness to the hearts of men. It meant that the aim of human life is to reflect in one's own thought and activity the attributes of God. Perfection in human life could be reached only by expressing in one's life more and more divine qualities. God's way is that He extends his bounties to all — the pious and the sinner,

the believer and the non-believer, the high and the low. When the sun rises, it gives light and warmth to all living beings; when it rains, all benefit from the showers; the earth keeps its bosom open for all Khwaja Mu'in-u'd-din Chishti, the founder of the Chishti silsilah in India, advised his followers to develop river-like generosity, sun-like affection and earth-like hospitality (*Siyar-al-Auliya*). As these phenomena of nature make no distinction between any creature of God, likewise man should not discriminate between one human being and another. Shaikh Nizam-u'd-din Auliya told his audience that once Prophet Abraham (A.S.) was reluctant to ask a non-believer to partake of food with him. Prompt came the admonition from God: 'Oh Abraham! We can give life to this man but you cannot give food to him.' The Sufi *khanqahs* supplied food and shelter to all sorts of people, no matter to what religion they belonged. Shaikh Nizam-u'd-din Auliya used to fast regularly. When food was brought to him at the time of *sahri*, morsels would stick in his throat as his mind went back to persons who had gone to bed without food. A necessary concomitant of this approach was that man promptly responded to human misery and strained his every nerve to save people from hunger and misery. The Sufis identified service of God with the service of man. Shaikh Junaid Baghdadi was quoted in the mystic circles of Delhi as saying that he found God among the poor people in the streets of Medina. Bibi Fatima Sam, a very respected mystic woman of medieval India whose hut in Delhi attracted people from far and near, used to say that the divine reward for giving a piece of bread and a glass of water to the hungry was greater than offering thousands of genuflexions of prayer and keeping thousands of fasts.⁴⁴

Shaikh Nizam-u'd-din Auliya classified devotion to God into two categories: *ta'at-i lazmi* and *ta'at-i muta'addi*. *Ta'at-i lazmi* consisted of prayers and penitence that an individual performed; the *ta'at-i muta'addi* consisted in helping the needy and the poor and feeding the hungry. He told his disciples that the reward of *ta'at-i-muta' addi* was greater than that of obligatory prayers.⁴⁵ One of the foundational principles of Sufi ideology was their faith in the Unity of Divine revelation, which paved the way for contact with people of diverse faiths and denominations.⁴⁶

Shaikh Hamid-u'd-din Sufi lived in Suwal, a small village of Nagaur, like Rajasthani peasants, mixed with people of all castes and creeds and adopted vegetarian habits. Shah Waliyullah, in a very illuminating chapter on urban life and organization in his *Hujjat Allah al-Baligha*, advocates the peaceful integration of all the components of society and their harmonious functioning to achieve human well-being. In fact, peace and goodwill between human beings was the end all and be all of Sufi endeavours. A visitor presented a pair of scissors to Shaikh Farid Ganj-i Shakar but he refused to

accept them, saying: Give me a needle: I sew, I do not cut' The Sufi saints were anxious to create in society the harmony of a perfect orchestra. Their principle was to respond hatred with love, violence with affection. Shaikh Nizam-u'd-din Auliya used to recite the following motto in life:

Whoever causes grief to us, may his life get more and more happiness?

A non-violent approach, sympathy with the weak and the downtrodden and consciousness of a divine mission to bring happiness to the hearts of men characterized the efforts of the Sufi saints of India. Their approach towards human relationships is neatly expressed in the imagery of eyes: "Learn from the eyes the way to develop unity and oneness. The two eyes appear different but their vision is one." The Sufi weltanschauung was based some basic postulates which determined their attitude towards God, man and society. According to Sufis all people are the children of God on earth. The *Sunnan-i-Abu Da'ud* reports that the Prophet used to pray at night: 'Oh God! I bear witness that all Thy creatures are brothers'. Sa'di said that the reason for human brotherhood was that all human beings were made of the self-same clay and were as interdependent on each other as the limbs in the human body.⁴⁷

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The basic principles which Baba Farid Ganjshakar adopted in the moral and spiritual training of Sheikh Nizamuddin Auliya included: "to pacify enemies, to remove rust from heart, to recite holy Quran and to remember death as it helps in achieving the mystical goal. Sheikh Nizamuddin Auliya followed the moral instructions of his teacher throughout his life, and cleared off the dues which he owed to people.⁴⁸ Baba Farid advised his disciples to maintain distance with kings and influential persons.⁴⁹

When Sheikh Auliya used to live near Manda, once it so happened that three days passed and he did not get anything to eat. The third day somebody offered him a dish of *khichri* (rice boiled with lentil). He used to say that he never relished anything in his life as that *khichri*. The endless starvation forced him to put a Zambil scrip at the door. People used to put eatables in it. At *iftar* time, eatables were taken to eat. One day it so happened that a beggar thought that the food on the cloth was left over, so he collected the food and left. Shaikh Nizamuddin smiled with patience and said: "it appears that there is still imperfection in our efforts and hence we are being kept in hunger."⁵⁰

The preference on others in worldly matters: “Sheikh Nizamuddin Auliya happened to meet one of his class fellows in Ajodhan one day. When he saw him in his tattered clothes he said “Maulana Nizamuddin why are you in just an impoverished state? Why do not you teach in cities? This could have given you better financial position.” When Baba Farid came to know about his friends’ advice, he suggested him to recite the following couplet in reply:

You are not my travelling companion, seek your own path. May fortune be your share in life and misfortune mine⁵¹

On the last days of Baba Farid Ganjsakar, the life at Jammat Khana did not have the earlier prosperity. According to Sheikh Nizamuddin Auliya it was like the day of Eid when the inmates got a square meat at dinner.⁵² Once when Sheikh Nizamuddin asked for Baba Farid’s permission to leave for Delhi, he gave him a gold coin (*ghyasi*) for his expenses, but when Sheikh Nizamuddin came to know that it was all that he had, Sheikh Nizamuddin Auliya placed the gold coin at his feet.⁵³

Jamat Khanah: was the centre of spiritual teaching at Ajodhan; it had many pillars where disciples of Shaikh Fariduddin Masood Ganjshakar (1175-1265) keep their belongings like books, clothes, tasbih etc. people from every walk of life used to gather here from different parts of the country to seek his blessings .they all used to sit on floors engaged in prayers. The inmates of the *Jamat Khanah* used to collect fire wood from the forest. Some fetched water from the well. Others plucked delah and Pilu from trees, to prepare food. With the joint effort the inmates of the *Jamat Khanah* used to provide food in the *Jamat Khanah*. This life of hardship was source of spiritual enjoyment for them. There were many people who gathered here after leaving out a prosperous and happy life behind them. Syed Mahmood Kirmani who was a flourishing businessman of Kirman came here and found the whole atmosphere so stimulating that he decided to settle down at the Jamat Khanah. His wife Bibi Rani was the daughter of a mint officer of Multan. She also decided to live along with her husband at Jamat Khanah. She took the responsibility of looking after the comforts of the inmates like a sister looking after her brothers. Ziyauddin Barni mentions about Baba Sahib that she was such a person who provided shelter to everyone.”⁵⁴

Shaikh Nasiruddin Charagh Delhi sent a message to Sheikh Nizamuddin Auliya through Hazrat Amir Khusro that just because of the disturbance from masses; he fails to concentrate in spiritual practices. Sheikh Nizamuddin Auliya responded Amir Khusro:

Ask Sheikh Nasiruddin to be among masses and shower all his generosity and love despite their resistance.⁵⁵

One of the contributions of Nizamuddin Auliya was that he converted mystic movement into a mass movement in South Asia. Everyone who approached him was allowed to become his disciple. He sent seven hundred disciples to different parts of the country.⁵⁶ He gave instructions that his Khalifah should never keep himself away from the masses. His door should always be open for all and sundry, humility is a must for saints. Service of human beings was always considered by him as of greater spiritual significance.⁵⁷

The *Khanqah* of Sheikh Nizamuddin was situated at Giyaspur, a village named after sultan Ghyasuddin Balban, standing by river Jamuna, gifts used to flow into Khanqah like a tributary of Jamuna being received as *Futuh* (unsolicited gifts) from rich or poor was to be distributed among needy. From dawn to midnight people used to visit *Khanqah* with different kinds of gifts. The responsibility of managing and distributing *Futuh* among the needy was given to Iqbal. Whenever huge quantity of *Futuh* came to the *Khanqah*, Sheikh used to take personal interest in disbursing it at the earliest. It was the policy of The Sheikh to disburse everything received as *futuh* by every Friday.⁵⁸

The kitchen of khanqah used to run whole day. Though he himself fasted regularly, food was served to all visitors without any discrimination of religion, caste and creed. The seniors of *khanqah* were assigned the duty of supervising the kitchen. Maulana Burliqnuddin Gharib was the over all in charge of the kitchen. Feast and hospitality had important place in the life style of *khanqah*. Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya always quoted Bibi Fatima Sam that a piece of bread and a glass of water to needy has more value than any amount of prayers and fasts.⁵⁹

The sheikh always ensured the dignity of visitors. Proper instructions were issued to disciples that they should not ask visitors whether they were fasting or not. Sheikh was providing solution both to spiritual and material problems of the people: "his treatment of his visitors always provided inner strength, courage and conviction to the visitors. His approach was always helpful in reducing tension. Sheikh was always polite and courteous even with those who misbehaved with him.

Nizamuddin had a spiritual realisation of the fact that bringing consolation to distressed hearts is the basis of spiritual exercise. He always believed that helping the needy and down trodden is the best way of coming near to God. The easiest way to God Almighty was to "help the distressed souls "quoting Sheikh Abu Said Abul Khair who was asked about the easiest way to take us to God. Nizamuddin gave a revolutionary concept of religion

where service to human beings occupied an important place than formal prayers. He explained devotion to God as of two types: *lazmi* (intransitive) and *mutaaddi* (transitive). In *lazim* devotion, the benefit is confined to the devotee. It includes prayers, fast and pilgrimage etc. On the other hand, the *mutaaddi* devotion brings advantage and comforts to others. The reward of *mutaaddi* devotion is endless and limitless. To elaborate his points, he always quoted stories from the lives of Saints. He made his mystic movement a humanitarian activity as He elaborated his point, by citing an example of prophet Ibrahim (AS), who was reluctant to offer food to a *Kafir* but was advised by God to be generous to all. He always advised his followers to distribute wealth; he was totally against the attitude of conserving wealth as the real pleasure lies in the distribution of wealth. He propagated the concept of brotherhood which is a primary source to bring happiness to human heart and patience always helps in resolving issues. Anger never helps in solving problems and therefore one should always follow the principles of forget and forgive.

References and Notes

⁴⁰ Ibid, P.102.

⁴¹ Ibid, pp-116-117.

⁴² Ibid, p.119.

⁴³ Ibid, p.150.

⁴⁴ *Ma'arij-al-Walayāt*, MS.

⁴⁵ Sa'di, the famous Persian poet, echoed the same sentiments when he said :(Higher spiritual life is nothing but service of humanity, it is not (chanting) the rosary, (remaining on the) prayer carpet or (wearing) coarse garments.)

⁴⁶ Amir Khusrau, who had delved deep into the Hindu religious literature, said: Though Hindus do not believe in the religion in which we do, In many matters they and we believe in the same thing. (Nuh Sipihr, p.163). Mirza Mazhar Jan-i-Janan believed in the divine character of the Vedas. Works like *Bahr-al-Hayat*, *Jawahir-i Khamsa* and *Marj-us-Bahrain* could never have come into existence without being inspired by this basic ideological position. The Upanishads, which contain the earliest exposition of pantheistic philosophy, inspired Muslim mystic thought in many ways. Shah Niaz Ahmad of Bareilly thus declared the essential unity of all religions: "All these religions and faiths are branches of the same tree; They have sprouted from one and the same root".

⁴⁷ Once Dara Shukoh asked Shah Muhibb-ullah of Allahabad, a distinguished saint of the Chishti order, if religion permitted making a distinction between a *Hindu and a Muslim*. The saint's emphatic reply was 'no'. To strengthen his point further he said that the Prophet was sent as a 'Blessing for all Mankind' and therefore no distinction could be made between one individual and another on the basis of religion (*Maktubat-i Shah Muhibbullah*, MS).

⁴⁸ Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, translated by A R Fatihi, *Sheikh Nizamuddin Auliya*, National Book Trust, India, 2003 p-35.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p-36.

⁵⁰ Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, translated by A R Fatihi, *Sheikh Nizamuddin Auliya*, National Book Trust, India, 2003, pp.26-27.

⁵¹ Ibid, p.33.

⁵² Ibid, p.34.

⁵³ Ibid, pp. 35-36. On Friday 25th, Ramazan –ul –Mubarak (669) Hijri), after the prayers, Baba Farid put his saliva into the mouth of Sheikh Nizamuddin and advised him to memorise the holy Quran and handed over the certificate to him. He said: "God has given you both the worlds. Go and take the Empire of India" Baba Farid always prayed to God for his bright future and good luck. He used to say "you will be a tree under whose soothing shadow the people will find comfort."

⁵⁴ Ibid, P.30.

⁵⁵ Ibid, p.39.

⁵⁶ Ibid, p.38.

⁵⁷ Ibid, pp. 40-43.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p.44.

⁵⁹ Ibid, pp.48-49.