INTRODUCTION

Mysticism, as part of any religion, believes that the man is capable of reaching or uniting with “the Absolute Being”, “the Real Being”, “the metaphysical world” using the capacities that have been given to him. There is no difference between a Buddhist, a Jew, a Christian and a Muslim in the mental state of trance, ecstasy or communion with God. There is no doubt that the great religions differ from each other in fundamental respects. But they are not nearly so far from one another as they may seem. It has become a platitude to observe that mysticism is the same whatever the religion professed by an individual mystic: a constant and unvarying phenomenon of the universal yearning of the human spirit for personal communion with God. Much effort and erudition have however also been expended to show how one religion has been influenced by another.

DEFINITION

“Sufism” (tasawwuf) can be described as a specific kind of mysticism developed by Muslims. There are more than 2,000 definitions of the term “Sufism”. Approaches to the phenomenon of “Sufism” are manifold. To analyze the mystical experience itself is next to impossible, since words can never plumb the depths of this experience. Even the finest psychological analysis is limited: words remain on the shore, as the Sufis would say.

The term “Sufism” can only be applied to a sort of mysticism developed by Muslims. Even the name is Arabic. Dismissing the fanciful derivations offered by some adherents, both ancient and modern, who were seeking a more dignified etymology, there is no doubt that the word comes from the Arabic sip (wool) and refers to the woolen garments (equivalent to the monk’s hair shirt) worn by early Muslim ascetics (zuhhād) to symbolize their lack of concern for worldly things. “Sufi” is also considered by some to be derived from a word meaning “pure”.

HISTORY

Sufism traces its origins back to the Prophet of Islam and takes inspiration from the divine word as revealed through him in the Koran. From the earliest period of Sufism, the Koran and the life of the Prophet and his sayings (hadiths) have played an important role. While, in its earliest period, the Koran and the hadiths served asceticism, in later years Sufis managed to derive their principles from these sources.

The earliest Sufis were, in fact, ascetics and quietists rather than mystics. After the conquests of the neighboring lands and expansion of the Islamic state, Muslims encountered other cultures. This made the Muslims interpret the cultural heritage of Islam howat different it was from in the past. The asceticism in their life turned into Sufism: each creating his own way of seeking God’s consent, began to seek fellows or a master according to his own theory. This period went hand in hand with the practice of Sufism. In addition, this period was a very productive time when famous Sufi masters, themselves holy men, taught the nascent doctrine of Sufism to their disciples, either individually or in groups. The Persian Sufi theorist Huciviri (Hudjwiri (d.465/1072) enumerates several schools of mysticism that transmitted the teaching of the masters.

However, the real master-disciple (sheikh-mürid) relationship was still in embryonic form. The period of the “Great Sufi Orders (tariqats)” is also known as the pe-
riod of real “Sufism” (the sixth/twelfth century). The word tariqat literally means ‘way, path’.9 This period corresponds to the years of the Mongol invasions and later, the Crusades. Seeking silence and peace of mind, people took refuge in convents. From the ancient times, convents had been isolated oases for the abandonment of worldly life, but the time had come for them to be linked up in a widespread brotherhood of mystics acknowledging a common master and using a common discipline and ritual. Certain temperaments, methods, and differences of thought were other reasons for formation of the orders.10 The mysticism of this period, wherein the tariqats (Sufi orders) had been born, could also be called “organized popular mysticism”.11

During this stage, Sufi doctrine was becoming formalized: the way was mapped out, systems of maqāmāt (stages) and halāt (mystic states) were worked out, through which the seeker must pass in order to attain ultimate, God.12 Personal effort was inevitable under the control of a mūrtid (guide). After a while, one might receive gifts of visions from the Almighty. To attain these gifts, it was necessary to follow a path (tariqat). Only a few might achieve both ma’rifā (gnosis) and wilāya (sainthood) without following a path. Each order is distinguished by its particular rituals far more than by its doctrine.13 Each founder laid down certain rules concerning relationships between followers and the rituals of his order; wrote manuals, litanies and praises which the followers could read during ceremonies; and prescribed certain religious exercises. Once a person has been initiated into an order, he or she remains attached not only to the present sheikh, but the founder and his successors, hence ensuring the continuity of spiritual bondage and allegiance.14

With the beginning of the tariqat period, it became customary to build tekkes and khankahs for the muridān (adherents of a sheikh) or dervishes.15 The first masters did not claim leadership for themselves. However, admiring their way of life, people spontaneously gathered around them. The most important Sufi orders in the Ottoman Empire were the Qādiriyya, Mawlawiyya, the Naqshbandiyya, the Dījjwatiyya (or Dījwetiyye in Turkish), the Khalwatiyya, the Bayrāmiyya, the Rifa’īyya and the Bektāshīyya.

TEACHING

Sufism teaches people that all nations pray one God in their own language. Its message of peace with and for all, has endeared it to Muslims and non-Muslims alike.16 Sufism describes ‘the perfect man’ as ‘praised in all religions’.17 Also, during the dhikr18 ceremonies, Sufis use God’s universal name, “Ḥū” (He), rather than his other specific names.19 In a divine tradition/saying20: “I am as my servant thinks that I am.” This universal view, common to all forms of mysticism, can play an important role in the dialogue between world religions.

For instance, according to the world-wide known Sufi Mawlānā Dījālāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d.672/1273), to whom the Mawlawiyya is ascribed, religions are like ways to the top of a mountain. Once one reaches to the top, understands that although they were seemed to be different, they all lead to the same end. So, essentially, there is no difference between them, for the ones who managed to reach the Absolute, the Real. To him, “religions are like ladders to the sky. Everyone has his/her own ladder. And as everyone minds his/her own ladder, is unaware of others’ ladders. But, in fact, they all go towards the same infinite.22 To him, there is no difference between the Prophet Mūsā and Pharaoh for those who reached to “white”, using all colours,23 as they are far from all religions, being from the “Gods’ order”. His words in Persian are: Millet-i asḥaq ez heme dinhā djdā est/ Ashqānra millet i medhheb-i Khudā est.24 His understanding of Sufism is based on “love of God”, and not on ascetic discipline. This was the best way to attain God, as many Sufis agreed, but at the same time was something gifted by God, not can be reached through some practices.

Mawlānā had many followers from different religions. And when he died, they all held his funeral in accordance with their own religions. It is not surprising that reforming Ottoman sultans used the Mawlawi order against the ieldā, who supported the treatment of the Muslim community as a privileged community against the dhimmīs25 (the Jews and Christians between whom and the Muslims there is, according to Muslim law, a certain legal relation).26

In fact, the Koran needs no commentary regarding tolerance and understanding others. Many verses in the Koran clearly state the existence of different religions is a law of God. The Koran states: “For each We have appointed a law and path; and if God had wished He would have made you one people. But He has made you as you are that He may put you to the test in what He has given you. So vie with one another in good works. Unto God you will all be brought back and He will then tell you about those things wherein you differed.”27 The Koran always describes itself and the prophet Muhammad as “confirming” previous divine religions,28 not abolishing them. Being a Muslim requires belief in all the earlier books and prophets. Nothing comparable to this rule can be found in other religions.29

REFERENCES

3 Ibid, p.11.
ANNOUNCEMENT FOR STUDENTS

DOING RESEARCH ON SI KhI SM

Most of the literature on Sikhism in Punjabi, English and other languages is superficial, superfluous, contradictory and outright repudiation of Nanakian Philosophy (Gurmat) enshrined in the Aad Guru Granth Sahib (AGGS), the only authentic source of Nanakian Philosophy. Such misinterpretations are found in books, professional and non-professional journals and all the translations of the Aad Guru Granth Sahib in Punjabi, English and other languages. The irony is that repeated lies about Sikhism under the cloak of academic research published by Oxford University Press, Cambridge University Press and encyclopedias are taken as truth by the gullible Sikhs.

My recent analysis of the works of W. H. McLeod, Pashaura Singh, Harjoit Oberoi and Doris Jakobsh has revealed that the McLeodian School is creating its own version of Sikhism like the Udasais and Nirmalas created their Brahmanical version of Sikhism. After a great deal of introspection and pondering over this problem with learned Sikhs we are announcing free help and guidance to students who are engaged in research on Sikhism. We urge Sikh students studying for undergraduate degrees to take courses on Sikhism. We will help them with their term papers and theses. As a start we urge scholars to consult www.sikhspectrum.com and www.globalsikhstudies.net for information on Sikhism based on Aad Guru Granth Sahib.

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