

## **SUFI SAINTS IN KARNATAKA**

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### **-Abstract-**

Karnataka is one of the most important southern states of India. It has gained prominence politically, socio-economically, philosophically and in many other ways. It is a meeting place of many religious philosophies and a melting point helping to achieve the synthesis of the teaching of many religious reforms. Sufism is a mystic religion. It is an offshoot of Islam. Sufi saints are the followers of ALLAH and the practice of peace, benevolence and tolerance. They promulgated a religion based on the concept of love, the love with the fellow being and the love with the ultimate or the creator. Sufi saints and Sufism are an existing reality in Indian socio-religious fold and it has contributed for a healthy and amicable social order. It has lead to a new social set-up full of values, and discipline. Sufism as a religion of the teaming millions became the practicing system among the people of India as well as Karnataka. This study of Sufi Saints in Karnataka is thus an inspired attempt to portray this religion of the soul and heart. Much emphasis is laid on the concepts and special aspects of Sufism, along with various practices found in it. I was always attracted by its spiritual significance and practical essence and also its profound influence on the general public. Hence, my little attempt to explain the same through the life stories of some of the great Sufi saints in Karnataka.

**Key Words:** *Sufi, Saints, Karnataka*

**JEL Classification:** Z

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The main aim of the paper is to trace the advent of Sufism in Karnataka, the role of Sufi saints and their contribution to political, social, religious and cultural areas

including language, literature, music, art and architecture. To study the history of Sufi saints in Karnataka the archaeological and literary sources are important.

## 2. SUFISIM IN KARNATAKA

### 2.1. Earliest Sufi Saints in Karnataka

Sufism is nothing other than Islamic mysticism. (Lings, 2008:5) The saints who preached the principles of Sufism are called Sufi saints. Karnataka is one of the most important southern states of India. At present in Karnataka there are thirty districts and in these districts, four hundred and twenty five references to Sufi saints' *darghas* are found. (Tarikere, 2008:261-273). The paper concentrates on the Sufi saints of the Bahamani and Adil Shahi periods as Sufism spread and flourished during their reign. The advent of Sufi saints would have been from the very inception of Islam in the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D. in South India. Trade and commerce carried out by the Arabs paved out a way for Islam and later for Sufism to enter Karnataka. Sufism first entered the Western Coast along with the Arab merchants who have been mentioned in inscriptions as *Tajjikas*. (Shrinivas, 2000:8). The earliest reference to a Sufi saint in Karnataka can be traced back to 1301 A.D. **Hazrat Sayyid Shah Hisamud-din-Teighbarana** was the first saint to come to Gulbarga. At present his tomb is located in the fort near Jagath talab in Gulbarga. (Munshi, 1997:349) Another reference is to **Nurulla Qadiri** during the Vijayanagar period (1336 A.D.to 1565 A.D.). The tomb at Kadi Ramapuram in Hospet of Bellary district was erected in honour of him (Konduri, 1990:47). Karnataka was ruled by many Muslim dynasties. In North Karnataka, fourteenth century, happens to be a period that gave space for the first Muslim dynasty to thrive i.e., The Bahamanis (1347 A.D. to 1538 A.D.), and later the Adil Shahis (1489-1686 A.D.) After them, North Karnataka was under the rule of Nawabs of Savanur, the Mughals, the Barid Shahis of Bidar and the Nizams of Hyderabad. The southern part of Karnataka was under the reign of Haider Ali and his son Tippu Sultan (1761 A.D. to 1799 A.D.). During the Muslim reign, the Sufis had found an amicable geographical and cultural abode in Karnataka for Sufi flourishing and popularity. The kings and queens of Karnataka like the common people promoted Sufism. The Sufi saints who came from North India as well as from Persia, Arabia and Baghdad settled here because of its amicability and great concern of the people. There were different types of Sufis living in Karnataka, like the landed elites, warriors, reformists, literates and *dervishes*. Sufism has been variedly ordered and institutionalised. It has the practice of taking the pupil into the order (*Silsilah*) and the concept of *peer* (master) and

*perzad* (pupil). In India, there prevailed six orders (Shrinivas, 2000:4-5) and in Karnataka, four orders, namely Chisti, Qadiri, Sattariya and Shurawardia thrived.

## 2.2. Sufi Saints of the Bahmani Period in Gulbarga

The Bahmanis ruled Gulbarga from 1347 to 1424 A.D. and Bidar from 1424 to 1538 A.D. During their period many Sufi saints lived. Among them Shiak Sirajud-din-Junaidi, Gesu Daraz (Bande Nawaz) in Gulbarga and Syed Tajuddin in Bidar were the most important Sufi saints. The Bahmani rulers from the very beginning of their rule in Karnataka gained the goodwill and co-operation of the Sufi saints. In many movements of crisis connected with accessions, campaigns, and factious conflicts in the history of the Bahmanis, the Sufi saints exerted their influence in favour of one or other claimant. King Alaud-din Hasan Bahman Shah (1347- 1358 A.D.) had great respect for Sufi saints named Shaikh Burhanud-din Gharib, Shaikh Ainud-din Bijapuri and Shaikh Sirajud-din Junaidi .

(1) **Shaikh Sirajud-din Junaidi** came to Gulbarga in 1347 A.D. The King Alaud-din Hasan Bahman Shah selected him as a royal preceptor. Sultan Muhammad I (1358-75 A.D.) and his son Mujahid (1375-1378 A.D.) always counted on the prayers of this saint whenever they set out on a campaign. His tomb called Shaikh Roza *dargah* is located in Shah Bazar at Gulbarga. (2) **Hazrat Shaikh Saad Zanjani Rahimatullah Aulia** came to Gulbarga in 1351 A.D. His *dargah* is located near the Chor Gumbad at Gulbarga. (3) **Hazrat Shaikh Minajjuddin Tamim-ul-Ansari** came to Gulbarga from Daulatabad in 1352 A.D. At present his *dargah* is located in Kirana Bazar near fort road at Gulbarga. (4) **Hazrat Shah Ruknud-din Tola** of Qadiri order is said to have come to Gulbarga before Gesu Daraz during the period of King Firuz Shah Bahman. His *dargah* at present is located near Chor Gumbad in Gulbarga. (Munshi, 1997:350-354) (5) **Syed Muhammad Gesu Daraz (Hazarat Khwaja Bande Nawaz; 1321-1422 A.D.)** One of the most prominent figures in the early history of Islamic mysticism in Gulbarga was Syed Muhammad Gesu Daraz. He was of the Chishti order that had created a centre of Sufi culture at Gulbarga. He was born at Delhi on 30<sup>th</sup> July 1321 A.D. In 1335 A.D., he came to Delhi from Daulatabad to complete his education and became the disciple of the most outstanding Chishti saint Shaikh Nasirud-din Chirag. For years he imbedded from his master the spirit of the Chishti *Silsilah*. Gesu Daraz had arrived at Gulbarga from Delhi about 1400-1 A.D., and had settled down at a *Khanqah* in the vicinity of Gulbarga fort during the period of King Firuz Shah. For about a quarter of a century he propagated the Chishti mystic's principle in Gulbarga and other parts of Deccan. He died at the age of more than a hundred years on 1<sup>st</sup> November, 1422 A.D. (Sherwani and

Joshi, 1973:163). The arrival of Gesu Daraz to Gulbarga had a great cultural impact on the people of Karnataka with important consequences. It is said that the *Khanqah* of this great Sufi saint often surpassed the Bahmanis court in terms of the number of the audience. A Persian scholar to begin with, he learnt Urdu and had 104 literary works to his credit which are in Persian, Dakhani Urdu and Arabic languages. He was much revered and respected by all. (Machakanur, 2008:34).

A profound scholar, with a keen and penetrating insight into the religious sciences, Gesu Daraz gave a new fillip to religious studies in Karnataka. He has written a commentary on the *Quran* and another on the *Mashariq-al-Anwar* (a famous collection of the Traditions of the Prophet). He had studied Hindu mythology and was conversant with the Sanskrit language also. He mingled with Hindus and the Hindu *yogis* of Gulbarga and had respect for their sacred books and culture. His works were voraciously read in the higher mystic circles while the common people thronged to his *khanqah* in large numbers. His disciples who spread in towns and villages applied themselves to brisk spiritual activity and propagated his name and teachings far and wide. The poets, scholars, saints and sages of Karnataka in the succeeding centuries have paid eloquent tributes to Hazrat Gesu Daraz and have prided in their association with his spiritual order. (Sherwani and Joshi, 1974:185-188) After his death, King Ahmad I, who was a staunch disciple, constructed the *dargah* in Gulbarga. The paintings on the walls and domes are in Turkish and Iranian style. The *dargah* is even now regarded with great esteem and veneration by the people of Karnataka. (6.)

**Khalifat-al- Rahman** played an important role in the spiritual life both of Firuzabad and Sultan Firuz. His *dargah* is located in Firuzabad and it is unique in its architecture. (Michell and Eaton, 1992: 58-59)

Other than these famous Sufi saints, there are some more references for Sufi saints who lived in Gulbarga during the 15<sup>th</sup> century A.D. They are., (7) **Hazrat Shah Bahaud-din Langot Band Rehamathullah Aulia** (*dargah* is located near Shah Bazar, Gulbarga), (8) **Hazrat Moulana Hafeez** (*dargah* is located near the tomb of Shaikh Ziyauddin Qatal at Gulbarga), (9) **Moulana Qadar** (*dargah* is located in Sultanpur, Gulbarga), (10) **Moulana Iftiqaruddin** (*dargah* is located in Moulana Shahbazar), (11) **Moulana Kamal Girayan** (*dargah* is located in Sultanpur, Gulbarga), (12) **Hazrat Peer Bangdhi** (*dargah* is located near fort road, Gulbarga), and (13) **Bahaman Shah Sahib** (*dargah* is located near Ganjiriyani Mazhar, Gulbarga). (Munshi, 1997:354-356) A total of thirteen references to Sufi saints in Gulbarga, throws light on how popular was Sufism and how revered and respected were the Sufi saints.

### 2.3. Sufi Saints of the Bahamani period in Bidar

King Sultan Ahmad Shah I shifted his capital from Gulbarga to Bidar in 1424 A.D. During the Bahamani period, many well-known Sufi saints lived in the area. There are as many as 37 *darghas* of Sufi saints in Bidar. The descendants of the family of Gesu Daraz of Gulbarga considerably extended their influence into Bidar region. Sufi saints of various orders such as Chisti and Qadiri came to Bidar and they were given munificent help by the Sultans for propagating Sufi principles. (1) **Syed Tajuddin** is said to have played a vital role in bringing the social and cultural synthesis in Bidar. He was born in Khorasan, a city of Iran, and came to Kalyana (Bidar) in 1387 A.D. He was popularly called “Raja Bagh Sawar” of Kalyana and was also one of the prominent followers of Gesu Daraz of Gulbarga and at the instruction of his master; he came to Kalyana and commenced his Sufi activities. (Kulkarni, 1977:295) He was also respected by the Bahamani King Alaud-din II (1435-1457 A.D). After his death in 1397 A.D., his *dargah* was constructed near the Inspection Bungalow at Bidar. (KSGBD, 1977:562) Today Syed Tajuddin’s *dargah* enjoys a unique reputation as a great centre of pilgrimage for the Muslims and the Hindus. (Kulkarni, 1977:298-299) (2) **Syed Ismail Qadiri** from Bagdad held a distinguished place in the Bahamani kingdom and appears to have been a favourite of King Alaud-din II. He lived in the neighbourhood of Hindu Brahmana families and had good relations with them. The *dargah* of Syed Ismail Qadiri is located in Ghorwad near by Bhalki, a taluka unit of Bidar district. The *urus* of this saint is celebrated with great pomp and pleasure by both the Hindus and the Muslims even to this date. (Kulkarni, 1977:315-317)

During and after the reign of King Ahmad I, several saints of the Qadiri order arrived at Bidar from Multan, Mahan and Kirman (Persia). The present existing *dargahs* of the Sufi Saints of the Bahamani period in Bidar, speak of the Sufi saints who lived during Bahamani period in and around Bidar. (Yazdani, 1947:184-208) These *dargahs* named after the Sufi saints belong to (3) **Hazrat Shah Abul-Faid**, (4) **Hazrat Shah Ali**, (5) **Hazrat Shah Abul-Hasan**, (6) **Hazrat Sayyid Amir Hamza Qadiri**, (7) **Banda Ali Shah Majdhub**, (8) **Hazrat Nur Samnani**, (9) **Shaikh Badr-Ud-Din Qadiri**, (10) **Hazrat Makdhum Qadiri**, and (11) **Hazrat Sayyid-Us-Sadat**. The presence of these *dargahs* help to infer that, the Sufi saints had popularized Sufism in and around Bidar.

#### 2.3.1. *Khanquahs* of the Sufi Saints of Bahamani period in and around Bidar

Bidar has nine *khanquahs* named after the Sufi saints. (Yazdani, 1947:109-113)

They are., (1) **Hazrat Shah Abul-Faid**, (2) **Hazrat Nur Sammani**, (3) **Shah Wali-Ullah-al-Husaini**, (4) **Shah Ali Husain Qutb II**, (5) **Mahbub Subhani**, (6) **The small Khanqah of Mahbub Subani**, (7) **Chhoti Khanqah**, (8) **Makhdum Qadiri**, and (9) **Hazrat Minnat-Ullah Bi Sahiba**. Among these, the *khanqah* of Hazrat Shah Abul-Faid is the most important one. Hazrat Shah Abul-Faid (1408 A.D. to 1474 A.D.) was a contemporary of Kings Ahmad I, Alaud-din Ahamad, Humayun and Nizam Shah Bahamani. These kings had great respect for him. The study of the Sufis saints of the Bahamani period shows that they were popular among the kings and the masses alike in bringing welfare and social harmony.

#### **2.4. Sufi Saints of Adil Shahi period in and around Bijapur**

During the Adil Shahi period, Sufi saints migrated to Bijapur from various places like Baghdad, Arabia, Persia, Sindh, and from other places in North and South India like Daulatabad, Ahmadabad, Gujarat, Broach, Bidar and Gulbarga. About twenty-seven Sufi saints were living during the period of King Ibrahim II, about eleven of them were in the period of King Muhammad and four were in the period of King Ali II. Single references to the Sufi saints are recorded in the period of Kings Yusuf, Ibrahim I and Ali I. Bijapur remained relatively barren as a centre for Sufism prior to the reign of Ibrahim II but the post 1583 period saw Sufism flourish in Bijapur to a significant degree.(Eaton,1985:63)

##### **2.4.1. Dargahs and tombs of Sufi saints in Bijapur**

The number of *dargahs* and tombs of Sufi saints in Bijapur vary from large to small in size with almost three hundred. Thousands of pilgrims from all over the Deccan plateau throng to Bijapur and join local devotees in the celebration of *urus* that have made such *dargahs* the focus of popular Islam throughout India.(Eaton,1985:Intro., xxiii-xxiv) A reference to twenty-two famous Sufi saints of Bijapur during the Adil Shahi period are found. (1) **Sayyid Chanda Husaini** migrated from Arabia to Bidar in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century and joined the cavalry of King Yusuf Adil Khan and accompanied him to Gogi, seven miles from Shahapur of Gulbarga district. At present his tomb is located in Gogi. (2) **Shaikh Shamsal-Din Zinda Dil** was the only Sufi saint of the Shattari order, who came from Shiraz (Persia) to Ahmedabad and then to Bijapur during the period of King Ali I. (3) **Shah Miranji Shamsal-Ushashaq** of the Chisti order came from Mecca. He lived in Bijapur along with his descendants on Shahapur hillock called Manauwarpur (City of Light). Throughout the sixteenth century, when the Adil Shahi kingdom was ruled by Shias and the city of Bijapur remained virtually empty of Sufis, the two persons namely Shah Miranji and his son Burhan al-Din Janam kept Chisti order of Sufism alive at Shahapur hillock. In Shahapur hillock,

they established a *khanqah* wherein many devotees from diverse parts of the Indian subcontinent were studying. (4) **Shah Nur al-Din Safawi** was the only Shattari Sufi saint to have come directly from Iran (Persia) to Bijapur. He bears the name of the order of Ismail Safawi, the founder of the Safawi dynasty of Iran. (5) **Shah Abul-Hasan Qadiri** lived during the period of Ibrahim II and Muhammad. (6) **Shah Sibghat Allah** of the Shattari order was born in Gujarat seaport of Broach. After coming to Bijapur he learnt that King Ibrahim II enamoured to Hindu singing and playing, had cultivated deviate skills. Sibghat Allah was the only Sufi saint who questioned against the worldly pursuits of the King Ibrahim II and declared that the selling of wine and the practice of the prostitution must be prohibited in Bijapur. He opened a *khanqah* in Bijapur. Later he left for Arabia because of the non-cooperation by the king Ibrahim II. (7) **Shah Hashim Alawi**, popularly remembered as Hashim Gujarati, or Hashim Pir, was a Gujarati Sufi of the Shattari order. Muhammad Ibrahim Zubairi, the historian wrote that both Kings Ibrahim II and Muhammad had a great deal of belief in Hashim's spiritual power and that Muhammad declared him to be superior to all other Sufis of Bijapur, even depending on Hashim's council on important matters of State. Hashim was very much attached with the Adil Shahi king Muhammad and his court. Every day hundreds, because of their poverty to seek relief, came to him. He was perhaps the only Sufi saint of Bijapur to employ his good favour with the court for truly constructive social ends. (8) **Abul Hasan**, (9) **Shah Mustafa Qadiri** and (10) **Shah Qasim Qadiri**, all the three were brothers who came from Bidar to Bijapur during the period of Ibrahim II to spread the Qadiri order. (11). **Shaikh Abd Allah Aidarus (1631-32 A.D.)** was a Sufi of the eminent Aidarus family of Yemen who came to Bijapur during the period of Ibrahim II. He induced the king to wear Arab cloths and propagated the Holy Law of Muhammad in Bijapur. (Eaton, 1985: 69-128)

#### **2.4.2. Migration of Sufi saints in the reign of Muhammad (1627-1656 A.D.)**

In the reign of Sultan Muhammad, majority of Sufis came directly from Arabia, Egypt, Baghdad, and other parts of India like Bidar, Gulbarga, Burhanpur, and Gujarat to Bijapur. They are., (12) **Abd al-Samad Kanani** (from Egypt), (13) **Ismail Qadiri bin Hasan** (from Baghdad), (14) **Abu Bakrbal-Faqih** (from Arabia), (15) **Ahmad Nazir, Saiyid** (from Arabia), (16) **Jafar Saqqaf**, (17) **Saiyid** (from Arabia), (18) **Zain Muqbil, Saiyid** (from Arabia), (19) **Naim Allah, Shah** (from Burhanpur), (20) **Zubairi Qazi Ibrahim** (from Gujarat), (21) **Abd al-Latif Qadiri, Shah** (from Bidar), and (22) **Siraj al-Din Junaidi III** (from Gulbarga).(Eaton,1985:126) Sufi saints arriving directly from Arabia tended to retain Arab habits and customs in Bijapur. For example writing in Arabic,

conducting initiation ceremonies in Arabic, making frequent pilgrimages to Mecca, and sending gifts of money back to the holy places of Arabia were all widely practiced by the Sufis.

### **2.5. Female Sufi Saints**

From fourteenth century onwards references are found to female Sufi saints in Karnataka. These female Sufi saints not only involved themselves in spiritual teachings but also their main role in the society as mothers, sisters, wives are really noteworthy. They were also supporting their husbands in spreading Sufi principles. There are nine references found to female Sufi saints in Karnataka. The earliest happens to be of **Hazrat Masaheba Ashrafe Dojahan** (Kamath,1987: 912) who came from Arabia or Baghdad about 800 years ago to Kudchi in Raybag taluk of Belgaum district, and second **Kunja Maa Bee**, the daughter of king Muhammad Shah I (1358 A.D. to 1375 A.D.(Munshi,1977:356-365) Other female saints were **Hazrata Amina Bibi Dadi Ma Sahiba** and **Mastana Bibi** (*darghas* at City Market, Bangalore), **Syedani Bibi** (*dargha* at Tannery road, Bangalore), **Tawakkal Mastan Bibi** (*dargha* at Richmond Circle, Bangalore), **Hazrat Saiyida Amma Jaan** (in Mandya) and **Saidani Bibi** (in Mangalore).(Katpadi, 2010:7&78)

### **2.6. Contribution of the Sufi Saints to Karnataka**

The Sufi saints who professed mysticism made contribution in their own way to the social, political, religious, and cultural life of Karnataka. **Sufi Services to Society** - One of the ideals of the Sufi saints was to strive for the abolition of all discriminations, and inequalities from contemporary society. They received all men, rich and poor, Hindu and Muslim, free born and slaves in the same way. They served as socio-religious reformers in Karnataka. One of their great achievements was that they brought the Muslim aristocracy into touch with the Hindus. The Sufis could attract large masses towards them in Karnataka because of their simple life. They served the poor, the distressed and the down-trodden. As Sufism was based on liberal principle it attained fame among the Hindu religionists and Sufi saints became equally respectable to the Hindus and the Muslims. They established *khanqhas* (monasteries) which played a key role in maintaining the moral balance of the society in Karnataka. **Influence of Sufi Saints on Rulers, Administrators and Aristocrats** - Many Sufi saints exercised considerable influence on kings, administrators, nobles and well-to-do persons. They advised the officials of high status to help the weak, the indigent and the needy persons. They gave correct guidance and did not hesitate to express their disapprobation of some of the misdeeds and evil practices of rulers and aristocrats

and made silent protests .They served as a medium of contact between the rulers and the masses. **High Standard of Morality and Discipline** - Sufi saints taught people to cultivate the virtues of humanity, good disposition, tolerance, forgiveness and patience. They raised their voice against all vices such as drinking, gambling, slavery etc. They were instrumental in maintaining the social equilibrium of the medieval society of Karnataka. They played an important role in shaping the character of the people and exercised immense influence upon the people and on account of them many Muslims and thousands of people became righteous. **Education, Common Language** - The Sufis played a significant role in the educational advancement of the society. Their *khanqahs* became centers of knowledge and wisdom. Their religious discourses helped in the intellectual and spiritual advancement of the audience, while in some *khanqahs* formal religious education was also imparted. From the very beginning, the Sufis realized the need of learning the regional languages of the Hindus so as to converse with them freely in their own dialect language. So, they were instrumental in making Hindi and Urdu languages to be used regularly by commoners. **Work of Proselytism** - The Sufis were responsible for the spread of Muslim culture and Islam among the masses in the various parts of Karnataka. They had their own way of getting new converts from the Hindu masses. The Islamic concept of equality and brotherhood of men attracted the lower classes of Hindus to their *khanqahs*. There was no discrimination between the high and low, rich and poor in the *khanqahs* and the atmosphere there made them embrace Islam. **Art and Architecture, Literature and Music** - Sufi saints contributed to the development art and architecture of Karnataka by constructing the *khanqahs* and mosques. Their patrons constructed the *darghas* and they have become a living tradition of Islam in Karnataka. Khawja Bande Nawaz *dargha* at Gulbarga is a classic example to art and architecture. The influence of Sufism is not only confined to religious harmony but it has also affected the Kannada language and literature. Folk songs such as *Chakki-nama* (song sung by women to accompany their work at the grinding stone) and *Charaka-nama* (song sung by women to accompany their work at the spinning-wheel) formed because of Sufi influence.

### 3. CONCLUSION

Sufi saints made Islam quite popular in Karnataka. They tried to remove fanaticism between the Hindus and the Muslims and enhanced the feelings of humanity of love, tolerance and equality. They criticized and condemned the evil practices prevalent among the Hindus and Muslims and tried to purify the society of Karnataka. Sufi saints have been a legacy to the rich diverse culture of Karnataka.

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