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**RELIGION AND SUFI ORDERS IN CENTRAL ASIA
(TAJIKISTAN AND UZBEKISTAN)
AS DEPICTED IN PERSIAN MEDIAEVAL SOURCES**

Religion of Sufi Orders:

The rise of Islam is certainly a marvel of history. Born in the beginning of the seventh century A.D., it enveloped, a century later, a vast stretch of territory extending from the Atlantic to the Indus and from the Caspian to the cataracts of the Nile, including Spain and Portugal, some of the most fertile regions of France, the whole of the northern coast of Africa, upper and lower Egypt, Syria, Mesopotamia, Armenia, Persia, Afghanistan, Baluchistan and Maware-un-Nehar¹.

"Apart from a few vestiges of Shamanism among nomads, religious belief and practice among the indigenous people of Central Asia have, since the Arab conquest of 7th And 8th centuries, been confined to Islam. Islam culture not only survived but was actually embraced by all non-muslim invaders including Mongols"².

From theological point of view under Samanid dynasty Bukhara became an important centre of Islamic learning but "the hey day of Islamic culture in Central Asia was during the 14th and 15th centuries when Samarqand might have been considered as its centre"³. However, from all this, one should not infer that everybody in Mawara-un-Nahar practiced Islam in turn letter and spirit during Timurid period. As already discussed even the historical accounts about the kings themselves are confusing rather contradictory and in spite of the best efforts of Timur's successors and his biographers to prove that he was a religious zealot, a

fanatic who effected conquests in order to convert all people to Islam, the fact remains that most of the Timur's conquests, and his biographers to prove that he was a religious zealot, a fanatic who effected conquests in order to convert all people to Islam, the fact remains that most of the Timur's campaigns were carried on against orthodox Muslims⁴. The religious approach of the Sovereign had a direct impact on the practices of people in Mawara-un-Nahar, as is clear from Barthold's remarks: "The luxurious and easy life in Timur's capital was not without its effect upon the native Muslim population and even to clergy". According to Ibn-i-arab Shah the Sheikhu'l Islam of Samargand Abdul Malik a descendent of the author of 'Hadiya' played chess and diced and wrote poetry, in other words he indulged in pleasures which if not directly prohibited by religion, were not approved either⁶. According to Ali Yazdi Timur himself renounced both games when he repented on his death bed in Otrar⁷. Shah Rukh who was a firm follower of shariat severely repressed the pleasures condemned by religion. Since even during Shah Rukh's period Maware-un-Nahar continued to be under the rule of his son Ulugh Bagh who unlike his father and quite like his grandfather Timur followed chingez Khan's 'yasa' with a direct influence on the religious observation and attitude of people.

Although there were many grades and shades of 'yasa' the system of justice was essentially Muslim. The law courts were of two kinds: among the settled population there were the Qazis, who administered justice on the basis of written laws – the shariat, founded on the Quran, and introduced together with Mohammadanism, as has already been discussed under the heading of ulemas. Among the nomads the 'Bills', who judged according to the unwritten traditions and customs, 'adst'. Though these traditions were unwritten and unformulated they were nonetheless generally known; one prominent characteristic was that no difference was made between civil and criminal offences, all

crimes being viewed only in their relation to others, and being punished by damages in favour of the injured party. A 'bills' was properly speaking an arbitrator, versed in the national traditions but bound by no formalities. The proceedings were therefore entirely oral; no record was kept and no appeal could be taken. According to Shuyler "Among the inhabitants of Central Asia the majority were 'Hanfees' and a much smaller 'Shafees.' While Babur writes "the Semerqandis are all Sunni Muslims, pure in faith, law abiding and religious"¹⁰.

The mystical movement within Islam has exerted great influence in the life, art and literature of the Muslim people during thousand year history. If one is to judge the significance of religious institutions upon society in Maware-un-Neihar, a brief excursion into the field of religious sociology is inevitable. The Islamic world was by no means homogenous, but it was culturally unified and diversified at the same time. Within the culture were different civilizations; the civilization of the nomads of desert and steeps, the people of river valleys whose cultivation was based on irrigation; rain-land regions, mountain ranges, their villages, and the many faceted life of cities¹¹. The social significance of the orders was many but the religious significance was primary. In contrast with the 'ulmas' there were no class distinction among 'Sufis'. No doubt their Sheikhs formed a hereditary religious class, but they and their associates were generally close to the people; their institution "Khanqah" in addition to keeping open house, welcoming the poor and voyagers, were providers of spiritual "solance and formed channels of power with the super natural world"¹². Besides the immense missionary role of these Sheikhs and 'Faqirs' both in commending Islam to none. Muslims and in helping the newly to take it to the heart, the social role of their orders was also very important. In traditional life religion was the synthesis of human activity, all society was religious society. The orders binding together individuals under a supernatural bond, were themselves a social power. Orders came

to be associated in various ways with different strata of society. They frequently had a special relationship with social classes, regions, classes or occupations. Some were aristocratic, favoured by the court and 'Ulema' other had a popular following linked with trade-guilds or military class. The political role of these orders has been referred from time to time in preceding chapters.

While reviewing the Sufi orders in Maware-un-Nahar or Central Asia as such one cannot do justice without mentioning separately about 'Yasaviyya' Sufi order which is held by many to be the fountain head of various branches like 'likaniyya', 'bektashiya' and even 'Naqashbandiya' Sufi order. Little is known about the life of the founder Ahmad Ibn-ilbrahim Ibni Ali of Yasi (a town in Turkistan D.652 AH/1166 AD) about whom Spencer writes. "Ahmad's significances in the formation of a Turkish Islamic tradition is undisputed. The Yasvi tradition has many ramifications, religious, social and cultural, it played a role in Islaminization of Turkish tribes, in the adaptation of Islam to a Turkish nomadic milieu, and in linguistic reconciliation through the poems of Ahmad and his successor dervishes like Yunis Amir (D. 740 AH / 1339 AD).

The Yassaviyya was a 'teriqa' of wanderers, there were few distinctive branches pilgrimage became a permanent feature of Central Asian Islam. The Yassavi way was a way of holiness and method of religious practice which displayed the ancient religion of the turks rather than the mystical way. These wanderers spread the tradition throughout Turkistan and among the Kirghiz from eastern Turkistan northward into Transoxiana southwards into Khurasan and westwards into Azerbaijan and Antolia where they contributed in the person of men like Yunus Amir to the formation of the popular side of the new Islamic Turkish civilization but where the Yassavi as a distinctive tradition did not establish itself¹³.

The strength of the Ahmad's cult during Timurid period who was then called as 'Hazati-Turkistan' is shown by Timur's

readiness to erect an edifice (completed in 801 AH./1398 AD) on the Syr Darya consisting of two domed structures, one over Ahmad's grave and other over the mosque¹⁵. The order stressed the retreat (Khalwa) and Khalwatiya which developed in the Azerbaijan region and spread to Antolia may be regarded as the western Turkiish extension. It also claimed Bahauddin Naqashbandi as a descendent through the dervish Sultan Khalil 7th. Still in 16th century Mirza Haider Daughlat has mentioned the Yassavi Shaikhs in Central Asia and even in Kashmir¹⁶.

In Central Asia the two century period separating the Mongol invasion from the foundation of the Safavid regime in Persia, was a time fervent, crucial for the future of Islam in region. The immediate conquest had been the displacement of Islam and now to prove itself and accommodate itself to none Muslim rulers, Shamanists, Budhists or Crypto Christians. It was a time pregnant with possibilities, and the outcome was the 'triumph' of Islam as the dominant religion of Central Asia. Sufism role was a considerable significance, not as a way but through its men or power manifested also after their death from their tombs, many of whose structures were raised by Mongol rulers.

"Central Asia therefore was an area of mission, and here the wandering dervishes were all important. At the same time Muslim sentiment acquired every where fixed centers of devotion in the tombs. These had their guardian dervishes and became the centre of Sheikh and his circle of devotees.

Ibni Butots is a valuable witness to their widespread diffusion for these places with their open hospitality were the stopping places for parties of travelers.

Barthold has rightly pointed out that "Although famous Bahauddin, the founder of Naqashbandi order, was Timur's contemporary, the sources say nothing about the relation between the Timur's court and the Sheikhs of bukhara"¹⁷.

Khond Mir while referring to various ulmas, Shiekh and dignitaries of Timur's time writes about him: "Khawaja Bahauddin

Naqashbandi's name is Mohammad Bin Mohammad Al Bukhari. He served his apprenticeship under Khawaja Mohammad Baba as Samasi and Syed Amir Kalali. It is recorded in 'Nafhat' that Khawaja Bahaud-Din was actually 'Owasi' and was trained in spirituality by Khawaja Abdul Khaliq Gujdwani. Someone asked him whether 'Hajar' (Public séances) and 'Sama' (recital concerts) were allowed in his 'tariqa'. He replied 'Khalwat dar enjuman (solitude in a cowd). 'Bzahir Ba Khalq wab-batin ba haq' (the exterior for the world, the interior for God). Khawaja Bahauddin passed away on Monday the third of Rabi-ul-Awal, 791 AH.¹⁸

Idris Shah writes that the dervish school called Khawajagan (masters) rose in Central Asia and greatly influenced the development of India and Turkish Empires. The order gave rise to many specialist schools which adopted individual names. Many authorities regard this as the earliest claims of transmission Khawaja Bahaud-Din Naqashbandi (D. 1389 AD) is one of the greatest personages of this school. Bahauddin spent seven year as a courtier, seven looking after animals and seven in road buildings. He studied under redoustable Baba al-Shamsi, and is credited with hainv returned to the original principles and practices of Sufism. The Naqashbendi Sheikhs alone have the authority to imitate disciple into all other orders of dervishes¹⁹. While as Spencer writes that "Bahaud-Din, who was a Tadjik also had Turkish links. Like most of the men after whom 'tariqa' have been named Bahauddin did not found an organization but gathered around himself like minded devotees prepared to strive towards a quality of mystical life along 'Malamati' lines without show or destracting rites for as he said, the exterior is for world, the interior for God. From the Islamic point of view it was especially important in ensuring the attachment of Turkish people to the Sunni tradition.

Bahaud-Dins's mausoleum and the attached convent (a magnificent structure was erected in 1544 AD by Amir Abdul Aziz Khan) because one of the most important places of

pilgrimage in Central Asia²⁰. Khawaja Naqashband who gave silsilat-al-Khajagan its name and form actually carried on one of the most strongly established Sufi traditions. Although so clearly Iranian and urban it was adopted by many Tatar tribes as a kind of tribal religious linkage and had its place in their triumphs following the death of Shah Rukh (85 D.A.H/1447 A.D.). During the century the rapid progress of the order, from Central Asia westwards into Antolia and southward into the Indian subcontinent led into its division into its three main branches (namely Central Asia, Western Turkish and Indian. The most influential figure after Bahaud-Din was Khawaja Ahrar popularly known as Hazrat Ishan from whom all the three regional lines derive.

Members of order were largely responsible for the spread of Islam among the Uzbeks among whom as already discussed Khawaja Ahrar wielded great spiritual power and among whom he consequently played a political role²¹.

The heads of all the independent states which succeeded the Mongols (except in Persia) favoured this great Sunni order, honouring its leaders during their life times and building mausoleums over their graves and 'Khanqahs' to house their dervishes. Although it weakened in time it remained the dominant regional order with great centres at Samarqand, Merv, Khiva, Tashqant, Heart as well as Bukhara. There were also significant groups in Chinese Turkistan and Khokand, Afghanistan Persia, Baluchistan and India²². "In India the same Naqashbandia Sufi order became the spear head of Islamic reaction against Akber's hearsay through Khalifa Baqabillah and his most distinguished disciple Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi²³.

01. 'A History of Kashmir' Bamzai, Delhi, 1962, P. 305;
02. 'The Modern History of Soviet Central Asia' Geoffery wheeler, London, 1964, P. 185;
03. Geoffery Wheeler, Op. cit, P. 186;
04. Zafar Name, Op. Cit, Vol. I, P. 577., Hafiz Abru quoted by Abdul Razak Samarqandi. F. 786;

05. Barthold, op.cit. Vol. II, P. 42;
06. Ibn-i-Arab Shah, Op. cit, P. 229;
07. Zafar Nama, Op. cit, Vol. II, P. 659;
08. Shuyler, Op. cit. P. 94;
09. Ibid., P. 87;
10. Babur Nama, Op. cit, P 75;
11. 'The Sufi Orders in Islam', Spencer Trimingham,
Oxford University Press, U.S.A., 1971, P-58;
12. Ibid., P 230;
13. Spencer, Op. cit, P 58;
14. Zafar Nama, Op. cit, Vol. I, PP. 466, 577;
15. Spencer, Op. cit, P 58;
16. Tarikhi Rashidi, Op. cit, PP. 369, 371;
17. Barthold, Op. cit, Vol.II P. 20;
18. Habeebus Saiyar, Vol. III, P. 543;
19. 'The Way on the Sufi', Idrees Shah, U.L., 1968,
PP.155-156;
20. Spencer, Op. cit, P. 63;
21. Matlausadain, op. cit, P 298 a.
22. Spencer, op. cit. P. 94;
23. Aziz Ahmad, Oxford, 1964, PP. 126, 130.