
UNIT 10 RELIGIOUS IDEAS AND MOVEMENTS-I*

Structure

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10.0 OBJECTIVES

This Unit will familiarize you with the :

- religious ideas and movements which took shape in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries;
- dynamics of Islamic religious ideas;
- significance of 'Millenium' in Islamic thought;
- messianic traditions in the period and
- revival of orthodox teachings in Islamic thought and practices.

10.1 INTRODUCTION

Religious ideas among the followers of Islam in India were very heterogeneous, especially with respect to question of hereditary kingship and role of state in religion and/or vice-versa and role and significance of Sufi thoughts and sants in the context of Indian social fabric. With the coming of Mughals in India we witness a major departure, which on the one hand redefined the notion of kingship and redesigned the configuration of ruling elite where indigenous non-Muslims were also accorded sensitive and powerful positions in the Mughal military-administrative structure.

Different Sufi Silsilah continued to flourish, often with the direct or indirect state patronage. Chisti Silsilah was the major beneficiary during the initial era of Mughal Empire with Akbar patronizing them greatly. **(Details have been discussed in the Unit-15- Sufi Tradition BHIC 107)** However, 17th Century also saw emergence

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and consolidation of Naqshbandi Silsilah and efforts of revival of orthodox Islamic preaching, though not very successful. Naqshbandi Sufi leaders like Shaikh Amhad Sirhindi and Shah Waliullah were prominent as they were critical of not only Mughal policies with respect to governance but also with the liberal traditions and practices prevalent among other sufi Silsilahs.

10.2 BACKGROUND

Hereditary monarchy has no place in political structure of Islam at all. Islam never believed in hereditary monarchy, however in 661 CE after the assassination of Ali, Muawiya came to power and started *Mulukiyat* or hereditary monarchy or caliphah. Although hereditary succession was an established practice in Islam but during Delhi Sultanate practice of election of ruler through consensus among the amirs/nobles often played decisive role. Moreover, initially rulers tried to secure *manshûr* or letter of investiture from Caliph and ruled as their deputy, therefore adopted title 'Sultan'. Name of Caliph was recited in the *khutba* of Friday prayer and Id prayers before the name of the Sultan. From 1206 to 1526 CE same procedure was followed by the Sultans. Some Sultans of Delhi had taken investiture from the Caliph of Baghdad like Sultan Shamsuddin Iltutmish (1210-36 CE). However other Sultans usually recognized the Caliph and included their name in the *Khutba* of Friday and Id prayers. It is suggested that this is one of the reasons for the title of Sultan because they were running the affairs of state on behalf of Caliph.

Legitimation through the authority of *Caliph* often gave the impression that Delhi Sultan also implemented *Sharia* and ruled in accordance with *shariat*. This is a misconception (**you have read about it in BHIC 107**) as there was an established tradition of *Zawabit* dealing with *Jahandari*. Zia ud din Barani, who is generally considered as an orthodox Muslim wrote *Fatawa i Jahandari* most probably in the earlier part of Muhammed bin Tughluq's reign (1325-51 CE). Barani also cites the discussion of Alauddin Khalji (1296-1316 CE) with Qazi Mughis where Alauddin Khalji asked various questions related to viability of *Shariat* in Indian context. Alauddin after having a very long discussion with Qazi Mughis concluded that he shall do whatever would be in the interest of State and people. One of Barani's contemporary Sufi, Mir Saiyad Ali Hamedani who is called as Shah-i-Hamedan in Kashmir, also wrote a book *Zakhiratul Muluk*, an advice for the emperors.

10.3 CHANGED TRAJECTORY: MUGHALS

In 1526 CE Babur, defeated Ibrahim Lodi and laid the foundation of Mughal Empire in India. Mughals did not believe in *Caliph* and they adopted the title of *Padshah*, a sovereign ruler. Name of Caliph is no longer recited in the *Khutba* of Juma and Id prayers. They followed Turko-Mongol theory of Kingship. They considered themselves as the representative of God on earth and this kingship is bestowed by God to them, so they are directly answerable to God. Nobody could question their action. Akbar followed *Taura-i-Changazi*. Akbar's court historian Abul Fazl wrote a detailed account on theory of kingship. (For details see **unit 9 of BHIC-109**) During Mughal period in India in the *Khutba* of Friday and Id prayers, the names of Prophet Muhammed, some of his companions, Khulafa-i-Rashidin and the family members of Prophet Muhammed were read and then the name of Mughal Emperor. This procedure continued from Babur to Bahadur Shah-II. Mughals never compromised on this issue and never

accepted any authority in the Muslim world above them on this issue, whether they were Ottomans, Persians or the custodians of Kaba. Akbar started sending a delegation on the occasion of Haji and sending costly gifts for the Sharif of Mecca, Mutawallis of Najaf and Karbala by showing them that he is so powerful that he could provide financial support to the Islamic pilgrim centres. By following this practice he declared and reiterated their sovereign position outside Mughal Empire as well.

Ulema were an important wing of Mughal Empire and holding very important positions in the empire. They were performing judicial work and therefore they were engaging with the masses on regular basis. Secondly, *ulema* were also appointed as Imam of the Jama Mosques throughout Mughal Empire. Almost all Qasbas of Mughal Empire had Jama Mosques. It is important to note that *ulema* received their salary/remuneration from the state exchequer, mostly in terms of revenue assignment. This dependence made them subservient to the wills of the Mughal Emperors. As Imams of the mosques they were reciting the name of Mughal Emperor in the *Khutba* of *Juma* prayer and Id prayers throughout Mughal Empire.

There are instances where *ulema* asserted their position and refused to follow the dictates of ruling dispensation. After Aurangzeb put his father Shahjahan under house arrest, he asked the Imam of Jama Mosque of Agra to recite his name in the *Khutba* of *Juma*. But Imam replied that Emperor Shahjahan is alive so I shall recite his name. Aurangzeb removed that Imam and appointed a new Imam, who recited Aurangzeb's name in the *Khutba*.

10.4 SACRED KINGSHIP

Changed trajectory of religious ideas of the rulers during Mughal dynasty manifested at several level. Various initiatives and policies of Akbar with respect to religious ideas have been discussed in detail in **Unit-17 State and Religion of BHIC 109**. Therefore, rather than rewriting, in this section will examine notions of sacred kingship and related recent historiography. A. Azfar Moin in his monograph *Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood* explores the growing tendency among the rulers to claim some sort of Sainthood, thereby move beyond the confines of *Shariat* and practice of *jihad* (holy wars). It was a popular belief that, at the onset of 17th Century when Islam completes 1000 years, a preacher will be born to revitalize Islam.

Turco-Mongol lineage which allowed Mughal rulers to claim themselves as *Zill-e-Ilahii* or shadow of God, placed them on a very different pedestal vis-i-vis not only political rivals but also with respect to *ulema*. A very concrete manifestation of this distinction was asserted by Akbar with the promulgation of Mahzar in 1579 CE. This was followed by *Sulh-i Kul* (peace with all; absolute peace) and *Tauhid –i Ilahi* (mistakenly called *Din –i Ilahi*). However, Akbar very carefully weaved an aura of sacredness around himself by initiating various practices, such as *Jharokha Darshan*, *Tula Dan*, etc. Before, further elaboration it is important to recognize the significant role played by panegyric writing style of Abul Fazl in establishing the sacred character of Mughal Kingship.

The question of Sacred Kingship should not solely be seen as exclusive innovation of Emperor Akbar, rather we find an earlier tradition of Sacred Kingship in the rise and

consolidation of Safavid Empire in Iran under Shah Ismail (r.1501-1524). At a very early age he inherited the leadership of Safavid Sufi Order in northwestern Iran and subsequently consolidated Safavid Empire. He was considered as *mahadi* of Islamic traditions. Thus he combined sainthood as well as political power as Sovereign ruler. The connection between Shiaite Safavids and Sunni Mughals were unmistakably very close especially during the sixteenth and first half of seventeenth centuries. It is interesting to note that if on one hand both the first two Mughal rulers; Babur and Humayun received, then Safavid, 'in turn, had borrowed highly stylized forms and fashions of the latter-era Timurid courts as they evolved from a Sufi order into an imperial dynasty. The Two nascent sixteenth-century empires had drawn upon a shared cultural context and learned from the other's modes and methods. It was no accident that in both these polities a similar style of monarchy developed, in which claims of political power became inseparable from claims of sanctity status.' (A. Azfar Moin, *Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood*, Primus, New Delhi and Columbia University Press, New York, Chichester, West Sussex, 2017, p. 4.)

Without further going into the details of Mughal-Safavid shared imperial culture, we will confine our discussion on the Mughals. For the purpose we also need to delineate a bit on the notions of *mahdi* in Islamic thought. It was generally believed that at the onset of first millennium of Islam a *mahdi* or preacher will be born to revitalize the Islam and rectify the ills of the Islam, if any. It is more of a coincidence that both the empires; Safavid and Mughals emerged in the century of the first millennium of Islam. There were others also, especially Saiyad Muhammed of Jaunpur in India who supposedly proclaimed themselves to be the *mahdi*. Thus, there was a concept already in circulation which further substantiated the unsaid claims of rulers like Shah Ismail in Safavid Iran and Akbar in India. Though, Akbar never made any direct claim to this effect, but appropriated symbolism. It was alleged that, may not be always believed, Akbar was claiming himself to be a new prophet or even a divinity descended on earth. This controversy was global in character, discussed in Middle-East, especially in Iran, Transoxania, Spain and Portugal.

Although, there was little substance in the allegation but these were in circulation and popularly discussed. Azfar Moin argues that the sacred character of kingship of Akbar can be deciphered more through rituals and practices than in any doctrinal point of view. He also suggests that we need to appreciate the fact that Sufi traditions were spread across the Indian subcontinent and carried image of Islam, where everyone was welcome. The gates to Sufi *khanqahs* were open without any considerations for religion or caste. There was widespread belief in the miraculous powers of the Sufi saints, which was contrary to the basic tenets of Islam. Thus, a very liberal understanding of the Islam had developed where charismatic spiritual leadership was a norm. Before we examine the specific case of Akbar it is necessary to point out that there were reactions and opposition from the orthodox elements. Most vocal opposition to the prevalent liberal tradition among the Muslims in general and Sufis in particular came from the Naqshbandi Silselah under the leadership of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi and in the 18th century from the Shah Waliullah.

Creation of charismatic attributes requires variety of inputs, including appropriation of significant astrological calculations, etc., monumental architecture, depiction in paintings, rituals and court etiquettes, miracles, illustrious genealogy, panegyric history, etc. Over a period of time Akbar strengthened most of these attributes. **(You can read about Architecture in Unit 13, Paintings in Unit 14, Court rituals in Unit 16 of this**

course as well as Unit 1 dealing with History writings, Unit 9 on Ideas of Kingship and Unit 17 explores relations between State and Religion of BHIC 109). Following incident highlighted by Azfar Moin is very illuminating:

“Akbar celebrated his victories in the year 1582. In terms of the Islamic Hijri calendar, it was only the year 990. But those familiar with astrology knew that in this year an important conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter had reoccurred in the same celestial position as it had near the birth of Islam and the end of the Sassanian-Zorostrian dispensation- a once-in-a-millennium event. Grand celebrations were held at court. New coins were issued with the word “thousand” (alf) stamped on them. Most significantly, a thousand-year history was commissioned, called *Tarikh-i-Alfi* (Millennial History).” (A. Azfar Moin, *Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood*, Primus, New Delhi and Columbia University Press, New York, Chichester, West Sussex, 2017, p.133)

Attributing almost divine characteristics Abul Fazl in *Akbarnama* offers a very detailed description of miracles associated with the birth of Akbar and his infancy. He writes that Humayun had premonition about the greatness of yet to be born child, Akbar. He is depicted as if he was aware of the astrological significance of the birth of his son, which would have made him greater than his Timurid ancestors. *Akbarnama* suggests that Akbar had the ability to speak in his infancy as Christ had in the cradle. Mughal claim to sacred kingship continued even after Akbar and despite criticism by his contemporaries, the belief in divine theory of kingship continued to hold imagination of the masses. Though Badauni had sympathies for Mahdavi, the messianic believer, but time and again challenged Akbar’s claim to divinity.

Patronage: Cutting across religions or sects

Akbar offered land grant to the *dargah* of Shaikh Moinuddin Chishti at Ajmer. He appointed a *Sajjada Nashin* to this *dargah*, so that he should remain under the control of Mughal Emperor. He also gave land grant to the temple of Vrindavan, an important pilgrim centre of Hindus. In both, farmans of Akbar for the *dargah* and the temple, it was mentioned that they were expected to pray for the longevity of the Mughal Empire. Therefore, whenever any festival is celebrated or a function was held or prayer was performed, gratitude to the Mughal Emperor was conveyed.

Akbar also gave land grants to the *dargahs* of eminent Sufis of India such as Shaikh Qutubud din Bakhtiyar Kaki, Shaikh Nizamud din Aulia, Shaikh Fariduddin Ganj-i Shakar, Shaikh Bahauddin Zakariya, Shaikh Sharfud din Yahya Maneri and others. Mughal emperors gave land grants not only to eminent Sufis but also to the lesser known *dargahs* of Sufis in different Qasbas of Mughal Empire. Through these land grants Emperors indirectly exerted control over the functions of *dargahs*. It also indirectly created his good name among the masses that Mughal is a devotee of these eminent Sufis of India.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Write a note on the Islamic religious ideas during sixteenth century in India.
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2) Discuss the idea of sacred Kingship in the sixteenth century India.

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10.5 PARALLEL TRADITIONS

There were other traditions which claimed themselves to be *messiah* or practices some sort of warrior santhood; another version of sacred kingship. Most prominent among them were Mahdavis; followers of Saiyed Muhammad of Jaunpur. It was during his visit to Mecca that he declared himself to be the awaited messiah. Hagiographical accounts recount uniqueness of his life patterns which had resemblances with the zodiac and celestial constellation and similarities with the life cycle of Prophet himself. He declared all the existing four Islamic schools of jurisprudence obsolete and preached asceticism. His movement was most active in the first half of sixteenth century in the region of Gujarat, Sind and Safavid controlled Afghanistan. Even after the death of Saiyed Muhammad, his followers survived despite prosecution and during the reign of Akbar persuaded him to accept Mahadavi millenarian ideology.

Another parallel tradition of warrior king was Shattari movement. In India it was founded by Shah Abdullah (d.1485 CE), who is said to have carried out extensive travel across the country. His entourage of devotees carries banners and marched with the beating drums. He himself dressed in the costume of a king carried all the paraphernalia of a royalty. Such traditions of sacred kingship provided the perfect backdrop for Mughals to experiment with their ideas of divinity in the dynasty.

10.6 CHALLENGES AND REVIVAL OF ORTHODOXY

In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries criticism against sacred kingship and messianic notions gained momentum under the leadership of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi. It's not that there were resentment against only the liberal attitude of the political order, we follow introduction of Naqshbandi order in India in the second half of the sixteenth century.

10.6.1 Naqshbandi Silselah and Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi

As such Naqshbandi Silselah started in the fourteenth century CE by Khwaja Bahaud din Nasqband Bhukhari, it was introduced in India by Khwaja Baqi Billah (1563-1603 CE). Naqshbandi order since beginning emphasized the primacy of *Shariat* and was opposed to *biddat* (innovations). They considered that *biddat*/innovations have led to compromise the purity of Islam. The most prominent exponent of Naqshbandi insistence on *Shariat* in the seventeenth century was Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi.

Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi argued that God has created the world and therefore cannot be and should not be identified with his creatures. Rejecting the **Wahdut-ut Wujud**, Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi proposed the doctrine of **Wahdut-ul-Shuhud** ("apparentism"). He was therefore critical of Sufi practices of ecstasy whereby Sufis claimed apparent union with the Creator. He maintained that the relationship between Creator and Humans

is that of slave and master. It can not be a relation that of lover and beloved as was claimed by the Sufis. Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi was insisting on the adherence to the *Shariat* and therefore treated as orthodox.

It is interesting to note that Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi was greatly appropriated in the later centuries as preacher of orthodox Islam, primarily on the basis of few letters which he wrote to the Mughal officials in which he demanded strict implementation of *Shariat*. Therefore, we need to examine his role and influence in the context of the seventeenth century India. In the words of Yohanan Friedmann, "One cannot assess him properly by considering only the few letters to Mughal officials he demanded the strict implementation of shariat by the state. The overwhelming majority of Sirhindi's letters and other works deals with questions of *tasawwuf*. His main endeavour in them is to integrate his Sufi ideas into a Sunni frame of reference, without depriving them of their peculiar Sufi flavor." (Yohanan Friedmann, *Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi: An Outline of His Thought and a Study of His Image in the Eyes of Posterity*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal and London, 1971, p. 114)

10.6.2 Shah Waliullah

Shah Waliullah (1702-1762 CE) was a noted scholar and a saint of the Naqshbandi order. He tried to reconcile the two doctrines of *Wahdat-ul-Wujud* and *Wahdat-ul-Shuhud*, his contention being that there is no fundamental difference between the two theories. He pointed out that in both these views the existence belongs to God and that he alone has actual independent existence. The existence of the world is not real and yet it cannot be called imaginary either. To maintain that there is one reality which manifests itself in an infinity of forms and pluralities is the same as to hold that contingent beings are the reflection of the names and attributes of the necessary being. If at all there is any difference between the two positions, it is insignificant. It was during the early 18th century when Mughal Empire was declining and communities like Marathas, Jat and Sikh pose a serious threat to the Muslim power we find emergence of Islamic revivalist movement led by Shah Waliullah. It was religious-political in nature. His religious and political thoughts influenced a group of religious reformers called Mujahidin (holy warriors). It was mainly in the post 1857 era, his religious thoughts influenced the various schools of Islamic revivalism: the modernism of Sayyid Ahmad Khan and the Aligarh Movement, the traditionalist theologians of the Deoband school and the neo-traditional *ahl hadith* (followers of Muhammad's traditions). (Unit 29: EHI-04, IGNOU, 1994)

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Write a note on the messianic tradition in India during sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

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- 2) Discuss the philosophy and influence of Naqshbandi Silselah in India during sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

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10.7 LET US SUM UP

Sixteenth and Seventeenth century India have seen reorientation in the Islamic religious ideas. On the one hand political authorities have moved beyond the control of Caliph, howsoever nominal it was in earlier period. The period also witnessed a growing experimentation with the Islamic ideas of 'Millennium'. Notions of sacred kingship gradually consolidated through diverse cultural practices, royalty related rituals and symbolism in painting, architecture and literature. Indian subcontinent had a long association with Sufi ideas and Sufi Silselahs which encouraged *biddat*, and never insisted upon strict adherence to the *Shariat*. However, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries witnessed a movement towards orthodoxy, especially with respect to various practices of Sufi.

10.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) See Section 10.2
- 2) See Section 10.4

Check your Progress 2

- 1) See Section 10.5
- 2) See Section 10.6.1

Recommended Readings

Green, Nile. 2012. *Sufism: A Global History*. Chichester and Malden: John Wiley & Sons.

Moin A. Azfar 2017. *Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood*. Primus: New Delhi and New Yprk: Columbia University Press.

Rizvi, S.A.A. 1978. *A history of Sufism in India*, Vol.-I. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal.

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