

## SUFISM AND GRADUAL TRANSFORMATION IN THE MEANING OF SŪFĪ IN SAFAVID PERIOD

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The history of the Safavid dynasty can be divided into three periods :

- a. Religious (gnostic) period
- b. Religio - Political period
- c. Politico - National period

Shaikh Safi-al-Din of Ardebil (650-735/1252-1334), the Safavid family was one of the greatest Sufis who due to his belief on Sufism, has gained considerable fame. Shaikh Safi was directed by Shaikh Zahid Giulani (d. 694/1296) to follow the Khorassani order of Sūfism<sup>1</sup>.

Both Shaikh Safi and his son Shaikh Sadr-al-Din, as leaders of Sufism, were absolute followers of Sunni Faith<sup>2</sup>.

1 J.S. Trimmingham, *The Sufi orders in Islam*, Oxford 1971, P. 100; see also his *pedigrees in the same source*, PP. 30-31.

2 The first indication that Shaikh Safi was a Shafei Sunni follower is to be found in Hamdullah Mostowfi's *Nozhat-al-Goloob*, Tehran 1956, P. 92 written during his visit to Ardebil, five years after the demise of Shaikh Safi. He writes as follows : «The majority of the population of Ardebil are the disciples of both the Shafe' school of the Sunni Faith, and Shaikh Safi' on the same subject see also :

(a) Ibn-Bazzar Ardebil, who himself was one of the disciples of the Shaikh, states in his book, «*Safvat-al-Safa*» (Manuscript Copy Ayasofya Library, No. 2123 Sheet 464) that Shaikh Safi was a Shafei Sunni believer. The following sources can also be referred to, in relation to the Shaikh's beliefs.

(b) Ahmad Kasravi, *Shaikh Safi and his clan*, Tehran, 1948.

Khwaja 'Alī, Shaikh Safi's grandson, was the first in his family who showed a tendency towards Imamites and became a Shi's, but his inclination to this faith was not very strong.

The followers of Khaja' Ali basically changed their beliefs in Shi'ism, after Khwaja's death in Palestine, in 831/1427.

They extended the concept of Shi'ism to the extreme, such that their leaders (Pear) was now considered to be an emanation of God, displaying God's attributes.

Under the influence of this extremism, the «Pears» began to treat those who believed in other religions, particularly Sunnits, very harshly, ordering the holy war (Jihad) against them, during which Shaikh Junaid and Shaikh Haydar, Shah Ismail's grandfather and father were killed as partisans. Shah Ismail, who spent his early years in concealment and had narrow escapes from death, was later recognized as the spiritual leader of the Sufis<sup>3</sup>.

When the Safavid clan accepted the Shia faith, Sufism lost its significance and was only used in its apparent and nominal sense. This was because the «Theory of the Unity of God and Man» which was the base of Sufism, is rejected by Shi'ism.

Those who followed Shaikh Junaid, Shaikh Haydar, constituting their armies, were called Sufis, various historical sources indicate that Sultan Haydar had ordered his Sufi Turkoman Partizans to wear scarlet caps (Tajs) with twelve grooves standing for the twelve Imams of Shi'a distinguishing them from others, and that granted them the honorable name of Qizilbash (red head).

The historian of the Safavid period believed that, although the «Red Cap» was called «Taj-e-Haydari», there are proofs that a group of Sufis were using hats with twelve or twenty grooves, prior to the emergence of the Safavid Clan<sup>4</sup>.

(c) Z.V. Togan, *Sur l'origine de safavides, Melanges Louis Massignon*, III, Dams, 1957.

(d) *Die Safaviden*, Saeculum, 1953.

3 Laurence Lockhart, *The Fall of the Safavi Dynasty and the Afghan Occupation of Persia*, Cambridge, 1958, P 15-19.

4 Aref Ardebili, who wrote in the 14th century during Sultan Owaize Jalayer's time and who was invited to Shirvan, by Shirvanshah Kay-Kavooos-Ibn Ghobad (744-45/1343-44) states in his book on titled *Farhad Nameh* (the only manuscript copy available is in Ayasofya Library) written that there were

It is understood that the twelve-grooved hat in the Safavid time was not meant to be a hat or a sign of the twelve Imams, but was the symbol of those who were Sufis and who had isolated themselves from the material life. Therefore, the word «Kolah-e-Fagr or Kolah-e-Fakhr» meant really magnanimity or independence crown. If one wore the twelve grooved cap, one was considered to have abandoned the material world and have reached the spiritual world. Being convinced of the impotence of this symbolism, Shaikh Haydar recommended all his followers to become Sufis and be none other than men Truth.

Fazlullah Khunji-Isfahani (d. 926/1520), the historians of the Aqqayunlu court, has several times indicated in his book «*Tarikh-i-Alam ara-yi Amini*» that the word «Tark» means to give up all needs and desires for worldly wealth and physical welfare and to deprive oneself from the material life. He writes about his father: My father Roozbehan replaced (Magnanimity Cap), rejecting his ancestor's positions, and lived in isolation<sup>5</sup>.

Fazlullah has indicated in his book the abstemiousness and worship of Shaikh Safi, the leader of Safavid Clan, and recited the story of Sultan Muhammad Oljayto's invitation of the Shaikh to his feast, which was rejected by the latter as he criticised the Sultan's politics and acquisition of wealth, and also his greediness for the Sultanite Crown instead of Taj-E- Tark (Magnanimity Cap).

The word «Taj» was defined in Taj-Nāme, written by Shah Nemattullah Veli as follows:

There are twelve grooves in each Taj, symbolising twelve «abstemiousness» and twelve demands. A Sufi should avoid twelve «indecencies» and demand twelve «deceases».

The twelve «indecencies to be avoided are the following: (1). Jealousy (2). Spite (3). Anger (4). Rancour (5). Egotism (6). Cavil (7), Selfishness (8). Lasciviousness (9). Inhumanity (10). Gluttony (11). Sleepiness (12). Evils<sup>6</sup>.

a group of people using Scarlet Caps with twenty grooves, viz., «Twenty Grooved hat on his head.» «He has worn a beautiful ragged robe» (Muhammad Ali Tarbiat, *Azərbaycan scholars*, Tehran, 1938, PP. 251-2).

5 Fazlullah Khurji-Isfahani, *Tarikh-i-Alam-ara-yi Amini*, Re-Produced copy, Fatih Library, Istanbul, No. 4431, P. 89.

6 See the article on titled «A Research on Qizilbash» by Firouz Mansouri,

After Shaikh Haydar's demise, the word Qizilbāsh was given to all his followers and the Sufis of the Safavid Clan, thus, the word Qizilbāsh became equivalent to Sufi.

It is understood from the sources that before Shaikh Haydar there were groups of people who had been wrapping a piece of red cloth round their heads. This caused fear in the heart of the on-lookers. The first person who, in the Islam history, wore a red head-band was said to be a man in the Ohod War and devoted his life to the Prophet Muhammad<sup>7</sup>.

Islamic sources record that Ali, the Son-in-Law of the Prophet Muhammad, wore a red head band in the Khaybar war, showing his preparedness and seriousness towards enemies and showing that he was ready to die, but not to escape. As a result of this seriousness Ali was successful in conquering the Khaybar Fort<sup>8</sup>.

Zia-Shakir, Turkish historian, acknowledging all above references, states that Shaikh Haydar followed Abu-Dajjaneh and Ali in wearing a red head band, saying that he will take revenge on his father's and grandfather's enemies and will gladly die for their cause. In order to create more bravery, belief and co-ordination in his army, Shaikh Haydar ordered everyone to wear a red head band<sup>9</sup>.

Shaikh Haydar's reason for wearing a red head band for making his army wear it, was that, by these means he could create an increased spiritual power and faith in his army members and Sufis and show them the way Iman-Ali went.

At the beginning of his rule Shah Ismail's followers and devotees were called Sufis. Consequently in European countries where Shah Ismail's name and fame had filled the political circles and also in other parts of the world where tourists and Ambassadors have spread information about Iran, Shah Ismail was called «The Grand Sufi». This name remained some how with all Safavid Kings till the decline of this dynasty.

At the time of Shah Ismail I (907-30/1502-1524), all his fol-

printed in Magazine of Historical Researches (*Bar'rasihay-i Tarikh-i*). Tehran, No. 59 P. 148.

7 Ibn-al-Athir, *Al-Kamil Fi al-Tarikh*, Egypt, 1938, Vol II, P. 106.

8 id., Vol II, P. 148.

9 Zia-Shakir, *Mezhepler Tarihi*, Istanbul, (no date), P. 95.

lowers and army members were called «Qizilbāsh» and the title of Sufi was given to a limited group of people and the famous as old Sufis and disciples of the Safavid Clan, so that the Sufis mostly were found in the tribes of Rumlu, Shamli and Qajar. The king was commander and leader and had the title of «Murshid-i-Kamil» (Great Leader)<sup>10</sup>.

The head of each Sufi tribe was called «Khalifeh» and the chief of all Sufi tribes was called «Khalifeth-al-Kholafa». Because the chief was the deputy to the Murshid-e Kamil his position was considered to be both spiritually and secularly very important.

This position was mostly occupied by the leaders of the Rumlu Tribe out of whom Hussain-Gholi-Rumlu came to be named as Khalifeth-al-Kholafa of the Shah Tahmasb (930-84/1524-76) and Shah Ismail II (984-85/1576-77)<sup>11</sup>.

After Hussain-Gholi-Rumlu dies, a man named Bulgar-Khalifeh occupied the position of Khalifeh-al-Kholafa. The latter was said to be of the Rumlu Tribe. The other greats of the Rumlu Tribe holding the position of Khalifeh while having other military and governmental posts were : Nur-Ali-Khalifeh-Rumlu<sup>12</sup>, Safian-Khalifeh-Rumlu<sup>13</sup>, Muhammad-Goli-Khalafah-Rumlu<sup>14</sup>, and Shah-Gholi-Kholafah-Rumlu<sup>15</sup>.

The basic condition for reaching the position of Sūfi was unquestionably obey the orders of Murshid-i Kamil (The Great Leader-Shah) and not to do anything against his willings Sacrificing lives for the sake of Murshid-e Kamil was the least and lowest possible degree of faith.

As a result of this deep faith and devotion to Murshid-i Kamil or Shah, some of the Safavid Kings were reputed to have miraculous power.

10 Nasr Allah Falsafi, *Zindagani-yi Shah Abbas-i Avval*, Tehran, 1955-62 (hereinafter referred to as Falsafi) I, P. 181-2.

11 Iskandar Beg Munshi, *Tarikh-i 'Alam-ara-yi 'Abbasi*, 2 vols., Tehran 1955-6 (hereinafter referred to as TAAA), I, P. II (-201).

12 Hasan-i Rumlu, *Ahsanu't-tevarikh* (A chronicle of the early Safavids), Baroda, 1931 (hereinafter referred to as Hasan-i Rumlu,) P. 134.

13 Hasan-i Rumlu, P. 268-9.

14 TAAA, II, P. 882.

15 TAAA, I, P. 326.

Many European missionaries who visited Iran during the time of the Safavid's have recited stories about the super-natural power of the Safavid Kings, although they did not fully substantiate the sources of these beliefs. A Venetian contemporary who visited Iran at the time of Shah Ismail's emersion writes as follows: «de ceulx de sa cour et ses subjectz il est ador (sic) comme prphete». That is «Those who were in Shah Ismail's court and all his men were treating him as a prophet».

A Venetian merchant who was in Tabriz in 1518, states that this Sufi-namely Shah Ismail is loved and worshipped by the people of his country as God, and that his soldiers go to the warfields unarmed believing that they will be supported and watched over by their Master Ismail<sup>16</sup>.

Vincento D'Alessandri, Venetian Ambassador to Shah Tahmasb's court, states that the love and the faith people have towards the King is unbelievable as they worship him not as King but as a God and believe that since he is one of the grandsons of Hazrat Ali, he has the resurrection power<sup>17</sup>.

Jalal' al-din Muhammad, the Astronomist of Shah Abbas I, has mentioned in his book the miraculous power of Shah Abbas and writes as follows: «When Shah Abbas was a child he started to suck the milkless breasts of Ali-Golikhan's mother and suddenly the breasts were full of milk<sup>18</sup>.

Also in the same book he says that «When Muhammad Mumen-Ibn-e Mirza Arab Mogalled Marvi, was disabled at the age of 5, his mother took him to the Shah and Shah touched his disabled foot with his hand and immediately he regained his power to walk.»<sup>19</sup>

Furthermore, «When Shah Abbas had gone as a pilgrim to Shaikh Safi's speculcher in Ardebil, whichever lock he touched in different parts of the sanctuary, it was opened immediately and this caused astonishment in the audience<sup>20</sup>.

16 *A Native of Italian Travels in Persia*. Trans. C. Gray London 1873, II, 203 and 8 and 206.

17 *id.*, P 223.

18 Jalal-i Munajjim, *Tarikh-i Abbasi*, Tehran, Makek Library, No, 3762, sheet 2a.

19 *id.*, sheet 200a.

20 *id.*, sheet 238a-239b.

All the beliefs regarding the Safavid King's miraculous find their origin in the deep-rooted faith in their spiritual and gnostic position. Those who lied to Murshid-i Kamil or disobeyed him were sentenced to death by the Sufis. Bulgar-Khalifeh, Khalifeth-al-Kholafa of Shah Ismail II, (984-85/1576-77) had the same fate when he lied to the King and he was kicked to death by Sufis at the King's order<sup>21</sup>.

The position of and respect for the Sufis in the Safavid period gradually declined to a level where only a small and special group of people were called Sufis. They had a very simple administrative position in governmental offices in the time of Shah Abbas I (995-1038/1587-1629).

Safavid Kings have been choosing Sufis to for the posts of Royal Palace guards. A group of Sufis were private guards of the King and always accompanied him and attended in his presence for the purpose of executing his immediate orders. Their number never exceeded 200-300 and their duty was to carry out the King's orders, executing those who were condemned to death by the King.

The Sufis killed their victims in Murshid-e Kamil's presence with sword and battle-axe, or by kicking them to death. Sometimes they ate their flesh after having murdered them<sup>22</sup>.

Shah Abbas I, hated the Sufis and did not trust them as they were disciples of his father Shah Muhammad Khodabardeh (985-95/1578-88) who was deposed (of his crown) by Shah Abbas<sup>23</sup>.

The attitude of Shah Abbas I, and his disrespect for the Sufis, reduced their credit and importance amongst people to a level that they were dismissed from their posts as guards of the King and Royal Palaces and were appointed as janitors of the buildings, watchmen and executioners.

Despite the above-mentioned treatment and disrespect, the Sufis never failed to hold their circle sessions on Friday nights and holidays, headed and led by Khalifath-al-Kholafa. Their food and

21 TAAA, I, 153.

22 When the body of Shaybak-Khan was taken to Shah Ismail, he hit it angrily with his sword and ordered the Sufis to eat his body (*Rowzat-al-Safaviyyeh*, Mirzabek Junabadi, Falsafi, I, 184).

23 For more information as regards the enmity between Quizilbash leaders and Shah Abbas I, refer to TAAA, I, 381-5.

lodgings were provided for at the order of Shah. Although the Sufis' respect and credit had declined to the extreme minimum, they were still considered the King's close men and by the majority of people they were reputed for their spiritual sacredness and position. Some people believed that a bit of Sufis' food, was a cure and remedy for sickness and disease. Shah Abbas however was not on good terms with the Sufis and called them ungrateful and rogue, but apparently pretended to respect them<sup>24</sup>.

Some of the Safavid Kings insulted other groups of Sufis, besides disrespecting their own followers. J. Rypka recites in his book named «History of Iranian Literature» the following: «Religious orders died out under the pressure of Safavid policy and with them the Sufi conception and speculations, which were contested and suspected by the Majtahids with the most intense hatred. To keep Mowlavi's Masnavi in one house involved constant danger. Moreover, Tahmasb I (930-84/1524-70) has already driven the Mowlavis from Persia. The Sufis were persecuted in an even more cruel manner by the last real Shah of the Safavid dynasty<sup>25</sup>.

Minorsky, quoting from Sanson, who visited Iran during the last years of Shah Sulayman's (1077-1105/1667-94) reign, says that the Sufis who were once respected, had now lost their repute in the court and were appointed to the duties of watchmen, porters, horse grooms and farm care-takers<sup>26</sup>.

As results of the decline in the respect for and influence of the Sufis in the Safavid courts, Shi'a Mullahs were able to gradually extend their influence in the Safavid King's courts such that Sufis became to be considered the enemies of Safavid courts<sup>27</sup>.

Consequently, the policies of the later Safavid Kings, especially those of Shah Sultan Hussain (1105-35/1644-1722) who was a very prejudiced Shi'a, were based on his personal hatred for the Sufis. The author of the history book «Tarikh-e Tahmasiye» (on sheet 131a) says that «Shah Sultan Hussain abolished the Sufis path

24 Falsafi, I, 186.

25 J. Rypka, *History of Iranian Literature*, Dordrecht 1968, P. 292.

26 *Tadhkirat-ol-Muluk*, translated and commented by V. Minorsky, E.J.W. Gibb Memorial series, New Series, XVI, London 1943, P. 13-14.

27 J.S. Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, P. 99.

which at the commencement of the Safavid Kingdom, was slogan. He also stopped holding any sessions or gatherings in the Sufis' circle «Towhid Khaneh», which was built next to the King's Palace, where every Friday night the Sufis circle was held and where the King and the high-ranking officers of the government together with the Sufi leaders used to participate in religious ceremonies<sup>28</sup>.

All Sufi leaders were exiled from Isfahan and Mullah Muhammad Bagher Majlis, the Shi'a great Majtahid spread and extended his religious influence and power across the country.

Reza Gholikhan Hedayat mentions in his book «Ravzat-al-Safaye-Naseri the exile of a Shi'a Religious leader from Isfahan who was accused to be a Süfi<sup>29</sup>.

It is astonishing that the Safavid Clan which was the founder and promoter of Sufism and which endeavoured towards extending and strengthening Sufism, finally decided to cause its decline and abolishment.

It is understood that Süfism was at the beginning a kind of spiritual and gnostic movement which directed the disciples to loving worship of God, frankness, innocence and which campaigned against any luxury, prejudice and illogical rules and regulations.

But despite the Sufi leaders 'and disciples' willingness Sufism changed its nature from being a spiritual school of thought to becoming an official, governmental and administrative organization which caused its own downfall.

In conclusion, it is worth noting that Sufism and gnosticism were inter-related with Shi'ism in the Safavid period. This caused a gradual disappearance of Sufism's apparent and external aspects and characteristics and resulted in the extension of its spiritual and gnostic aspects, but the interchanging enabled the inter-relation of these two paths to remain constant and unchanged.

28 Klaus Michael RoohrBorn, *Provinzen und zentralgewalt Persiens im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert Libertragen ins Persische von K. Jahan-dari*, 1971, Tehran, P. 58.

29 Riza-Gulkhan Hedayat, *Ravzat-al-Safay-e Naseri*, 10 vols. Qum 1960, VIII, 586.

## ÖZET

Safevî tarihi üç devreye ayrılır :

- a- Dîni -devre.
- b- Dîni-Siyâsî devre.
- c- Siyâsî-Millî devre.

İran'da Sûfiliğin liderlerinden olan Şeyh Safi ve oğlu Şeyh Sadreddin Sünnî idiler. Şeyh Safi'nin torunu Hoca Ali Şi'îliğe karşı temâyül gösteren ilk kimse oldu. Hoca Ali'nin müridleri ise, Şi'îlikte daha da ileri gittiler ve Sünnîlere karşı cihad ilân ettiler. Böyle bir cihadda Şah İsmail'in büyük babası ve babası öldürüldü, Şah İsmail Sûfilerin lideri oldu.

Şah İsmail I. (907-930/1502-1524) zamanında bütün ona tâbi olanlara Kızılbaş denildi ve Sûfi ünvanı Rumlu, Şamlı, Kaçar gibi kabileler arasındaki ba'zı gruplara verildi. Her Sûfi topluluğun başkanına Halife, bütün sûfi toplulukların başkanlarına da Halifet al-Hulâfa denildi.

Dini duyguları kullanan Safevî şahları büyük kuvvet ve iktidar sağladılar. Safevî ülkesini gezen ba'zı Avrupalı seyyâhlar bu hususu belirttiği gibi, Safevî tarihçileride aynı kana'ati ifade etmektedirler.

Suffilerin ülkede sâhib oldukları kuvvet ve itibar tedricen azalmaya ve gerilemeye başlamıştır. Şah Abbas I (995-1038/1587-1629) zamanında idarede ufak bir grup hâline düştüler ve vazifeleri Şah'ın emrini yerine getirmekten ibaretti. Abbas I'in bunlara karşı ilgisiz tutumu yüzünden iyice zayıf duruma düşmüşlerdi.

Sûfilerin Safevî hanedanı nezdindeki itibarını kaybetmesinden sonra Şi'î Mollalar Safevî sarayında etkili oldular ve Sûfiler Safevîler'in düşmanı olarak kabul edilmeğe başladı.

Şah Sultan Hüseyin zamanında bu daha ileri bir safhaya ulaştı; bütün Sûfi liderler İsfahan'dan sürüldü ve Büyük Şi'î mücâhid Molla Muhammed'in dini tesiri bütün ülkeye yayıldı.

Sûfiliğin ülkede yayıcısı olan Safevîler'in daha sonra onun gerilemesine ve ortadan kaldırılmasına çalışmaları dikkate değer bir husustur.