"Guru" Worship in Sufi Sect

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Abstract: *This paper contends that "Guru"s in the Sufi sect of the Muslim religion were also worshipped similar to Hindu religion where a "Guru" takes a place higher than God because "Guru" is the person who introduces God to his disciples. The paper extensively deals with the study of the "Guru" concept in Hindu and Sufi sects and through comparisons draws the similarities in the worshipping of religious "Guru"s in Hindu and Sufi sects. The similarities in the "Guru" concept in the early days, in the Virasaiva sect and in Sufi sect are clearly depicted. It brings out the worship of Muslim saints by the masses, miracles performed by Muslim saints and their healing powers which ultimately lead disciples consider them to be next to God. The paper also deals extensively with the reasons for popular worship of the dargahs and Sufi saints by both Hindu and Islam religions. The study brings out the fact that in its true sense, at first, Godhood was attributed to the Guru or Pīr, during 13ᵗʰ century the time period graced by Jalaluddin Rumi, Muslim saint and mystic. The present paper eventually concludes that Hinduism is tolerant and flexible enough even ages ago to adapt some Islamic practices into the highly orthodox and traditional religion of the Hindus. It should also be noted that Hindu kings were also patrons of Sufi saints and dargahs. This paper concludes with the impact of Muslim rule in India which extends to the religious sentiments of Hindus.*
Key words: *Sufism, Pir, Pīr as God, Babayya, dargah, Muslim shrines*

In Indian tradition the preceptor or the Guru occupies a highly important place in the spiritual life of an individual. The highest goal of education and learning being the attainment of Mokṣa or salvation, the constant guidance and direction of the Guru was absolutely essential. A student seeking higher learning was to choose a proper Guru who would lead him from darkness to light and not from darkness to further darkness. The Guru is a spiritual father of the student and he was responsible not only for imparting knowledge but for building up of the whole character and the development of the full personality of the student and make him fit for the discharge of his personal, family, social and spiritual obligations. Therefore, there is no wonder, that the Guru was God himself for the student. These ideas have been represented throughout our literature from the Vedic times downwards.

As time passed by, the need of the Guru was felt more and more to educate the people, to reform them, to make them conscious of their duties and enable them to equip themselves in a fitting manner. With the growth of Bhakti-marga which was more appealing to the common man the role and responsibility of the Guru increased and in every religious sect we see the importance given to the Guru and he is occupying a prime place. This is true of all the periods including the period of our study and it is true also of all the religious sects including the Muslim religion. We shall try to trace this Guru cult here since it was predominant in the period under study in the Hindu as well as Islamic traditions.

In ancient India, Guru was the proper person who could make the disciple understand the purpose of life. For education in those days was imparted not exclusively for finding a career or vocation in life for a boy but also for ensuring his spiritual growth [1]. Thus the Guru in ancient India became very important for one and all. In fact, the Guru had to assume all responsibility of the learner throughout his academic career [2]. He became the inspiration behind the student's life-achievements.

The dictionary meaning of a Guru is:
　　　"A spiritual teacher; a Brahmin teacher of Vedic lore; one who had reached the highest spiritual knowledge and has the capacity to impart his realization to those who seek his wisdom" [3].
The traditional praise of the Guru often quoted by all Sanskrit writers, especially of Sankara's school reads:
　　　Akhanda-mandalākaram
　　　Vyaptam yena caracaram
　　　Tat-padam darsitam yena
　　　Tasmai śri gurave namah

Ajñāna na-timiandhasya
Jñānanjana-Salākāya
Caksurunmilitam yena
Tasmai śri gurave namah

Swami Sivananda offers the following tribute to the ideal Guru:

Guru is the torch-bearer of wisdom
Guru, Iswar, Brahman are one;
Salute him first before you salute Hari,
Because it is he who has taken you to Hari. [4]

In the ancient period there were many grades or types among Gurus. To name some of them – Acharya, Srotriya, Mahasrotriya, Kulaguru, Sraman, Tapasa, Vatsana, etc [5]. Even though there were many types of teachers religious and secular, the general term to denote the teacher, as commonly used, was "Guru".

In this paper an attempt is made to trace the evolution in the concept of Guru as God, how it came into existence and how Guru worship became a cult in the different sects of Hinduism. Guru as a teacher was revered right from the Vedic times, but how the concept of Avatarhood has come to be mixed up with the Guru Cult deserves a closer study.

During the Vedic period the Guru acquired the utmost importance. He played a very important role in guiding disciples and in leading them towards the right moral values in life. He was held in high regard as he was the only person perfect in his Vedic chanting and way of life. Hence the student had to live in harmony with the teacher [6].

The Vedic studies pertained to the accurate pronunciation and recitation of the Vedas. Thus the oral method of teaching was the only way to master the recitation of the Vedas. The help of the Guru, therefore, was inevitable. For the explanation of the intricate passages and for giving an insight into the subject of study, the assistance of the Guru was essential. For the attainment of Brahma Vidya, the highest knowledge, the Guru was the only source. Thus the student had to cultivate utmost reverence for the Guru. He was to worship him as he would worship the God [7]. It has been said even the gods sought the discipleship of the guru for acquiring knowledge. There is a passage in the Chanogyapanishad which states the Indra and Virochana went to Prajapati to acquire from him the knowledge of Atma [8].

It is well known fact that the Vedas in those days were not written down. Hence all the Gurus took to oral teaching.

"Study was conceived of as discipleship, and the student owed the utmost reverence and obedience to his mentor (Guru)" who, in the ideal case, instructed him without fee in the Vedas and certain ancillary subjects, such as phonetics, etymology, and grammar. Memorization was a major aim, with an emphasis upon the recall of unquestioned knowledge." [9]

The tradition of giving utmost importance to the Guru continues in the Epic period and so in the early and later historical periods as well. In the Tantric and Yoga systems also the Guru occupied a prime position. The Guptasadhana Tantra for example states that Guru is the combination of all gods like Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswara [10]. Kularnava Tantra also extols Guru as God himself. The Yoga system also holds guru as the God for it is said the Guru may be having a human form physically but the Guru in him is God Ishwara only.

Moreover, in the Virasaiva sect, which was quite prominent in the period of our study, also Guru occupied a supreme position as an instrument of salvation for the devotee. As remarked by Nandimath:

"The reverence to the Guru, in the Virasaiva has no limit. He is considered to be worthy of more reverence than is due to Siva, the supreme, because it is he who leads the soul to unity with Siva." [12]

In this sect there are three kinds of Gurus: Diksa-Guru, the initiator, Siksa-Guru, the preacher and Moksa-Guru, the liberator [13]. A traditional statement in Kannada goes to say that there is no salvation unless one becomes a slave of the Guru (Guruvina Gulamanaguvatanaka Boreyadanna Mukti).

Similar trend is noticed in the later sects that became popular in the period under study. The Mahanubhavas for example gave utmost importance to Guru. According to their philosophy Mokṣa can be attained only through the Guru. Similar is the case with the Dattatreya Sampradaya. According to this sampradaya Guru is the incarnation of God and he comes down to earth to uplift the devotees. They wander freely as Avadhutas or Faqirs without any tie of caste or creed [13].

The two incarnations of the Lord Dattatreya which in historical times had formed the main subject of the Gurucharitra are (1)Sripada Srivallabha born in Pithapura on the banks of the river Krishna in eastern India and (2) Narasimha Saraswathi, whose sandals are worshipped even today at Gangapur in Karnataka in the old district of Narasobawadi. The work is full of stories and legends with instances of hundreds of miracles wrought by these avatars of Lord Dattatreya, wherein sick are cure, barren women get children, dead bodies are revived and so forth [14].

Jayachamaraj Wadaiyar explains in his book, Dattatreya The Way and the Goal that a real preceptor is one who does not show or boast of himself as the knower and preacher of the truth. He portrays Dattatreya as 'the preceptor of preceptors'.

The cult of Dattatreya is not Vaishnavaite, but a conglomeration of Saiva and Sakta cults. In this cult Guru is the dominant personality. He is known as 'Lila Murthi'.

It is interesting to note that almost similar or even identical importance is given to the Guru in the Sufi sect as well which was quite predominant in the Muslim kingdoms. Sufism is one of the main sects of Islam. The word Sufi means literally 'woolen' and by extension 'wearer of wool' [15]. In order to mould the followers of Sufism as perfect devotees of God, Sufism laid stress mainly on the following principles:

1. Dhikr (Rememberance of God).
2. Murqaraba (absorption in God).
3. Fana (annihilation in God).
4. Khauf (Fear of God).
5. Raza (Hope of God).

Any Murid (Disciple) who was initiated into Sufism has undergo all these stages of education. And in this process of learning, a Pīr (Master) is indeispensably needed. The importance of Pīr is so high in Sufism that without his assistance, one cannot become a real Sufi. It has been observed that Murid needs that guidance of his Pīr at every step. In fact every step in the progress of Murid depends upon his Pīr [16].

Even though Sufis do not have a ceremony as in Hinduism, the initiation of a disciple into the fold is as important as Pīr himself. D. M. Matheson in his translation writes:

> "Initiation generally takes the form of a pact ((bay'ah) between the candidate and the spiritual master (almurshid) who represents the prophet. This pact implies perfect submission of the disciple to the master in all that concerns spiritual life and it can never be dissolved unilaterally by the will of the disciple."

In Sufism the relation between the Pīr and the disciple is so intimate that, the disciple has to surrender himself completely to his master. In fact it is this surrender of the disciple would enable him to attain salvation.

Since the sacred relationship of a Murid to his Pīr, has been exclusively emphasized in Sufism, it implies how one should be very cautious in the selection of a Pīr [17].

Once the master is selected the disciple has to follow him and stick to him at all times. He should not stray away from the Guru in hard times. Come what may, he should follow the master and formulate his path to salvation. He would be committing a great sin if he disobeyed the master. Even if sometimes the master went wrong, the disciple was not expected to point an accusing finger at him. The relationship between them was considered so efficacious that, if a disciple were to leave his master, he would not be accepted by any other Pīr in Sufism.

In the first place, the Pīr in Sufism is to be a very experienced personage. He should have already experienced the divine ecstasy. Since he was the person to lead the disciple till the end of his journey, he had to be aware of the pros and cons of the path, to help the disciple, if necessary, in his times of suffering. Moreover, he had to possess the capacity to explain share the divine experience with the disciple.

In Sufism, the high stand of the Pīr made it incumbent on the disciple to follow him in all things, odd or good, what is most conspicuous is that, the disciple was to meditate on his master's form. The disciple when he was practicing the process of Dhikr or Zikr or remembrance of God, had to concentrate on the image of his Pīr. In fact, it is said that the disciple would reach the state of visualizing the divine light or listen to the divine sound only when he perfected the process of stabilizing his concentration on the image of his master.

In its true sense, at first, Godhood was only attributed to the Guru or Pīr, during the time of Jalaluddin Rumi. His acts were considered to be God's acts [18]. So much was the implicit adoration that sometimes even when the Pīr had committed a mistake, it was hailed as a miracle. It has been described as Līlā or unundestandable and thaumatergic activity of the teacher.

An interesting incident can be mentioned here which reveals the degree of the reverence shown to a Pīr in Sufism. In Minoqui_Arin, Shamsh Tabriz met one of his disciples. The disciple, on seeing him, is overwhelmed with ecxtacy and greets the Pīr with these words: "La ila illah Shamsh Uddin Rasul Illah" (There is no God beside Him and Shamsh is His Vice-Regent). People at that time, hearing this statement rushed towards the disciple to stone him. At that moment Shamsh intervened and corrected him by saying: "Say, La-illah il Illah Muhammad Rasul Illah" (There is no God but He and Muhammad is His Vice-Regent), for you can also call me by the name Muhammad [19].

Shi'ahs were the first to start the practice of worshipping the Pīr as God. Later this was adopted by Sufis. In fact this practice acquired a greater prominence in Sufism than Shiaism. For Shi'ahs surrender to God meant supplication to the Pīr or Imam, and a visit to the Imam was considered to be as good as a pilgrimage to Mecca (Haj).

Even though this practice of showing utmost reverence to the Guru was in existence from the beginning, it came to be more prominent in the medieval times, and developed into a cult. This was because, the devotion towards "a spiritual director who is human yet divine, who is a link in the hierarchical chain of preceptors (Pir, sheikh, Murshid or Qutb)," had reached the highest point in Sufism [19].

The Guru cult developed independently from very early times in the Hindu religion. But because of the interaction between the followers of that religion and the followers of Sufism in the region and the period under study it is quite possible that the Sufi concept of the guru did influence the Hindu concept in the contemporary period. This is strengthened by the fact that Hindus and Muslims have faith in dargahs and offer worship in the dargahs.

The cult of worshipping the Gurus in the Sufi sect evidently led to another practice, namely, the attribution of supernatural miracles to the Sufi saints in South India. From the mere priestly mediator between man and God, the Guru ultimately came to be equated with the supreme God. His human role was almost obliterated; and the came to be looked upon as wholly divine. We have some references to anecdotes of Sufi saints performing supernatural feats or miracles [20]. Supernatural powers like prophecy and endurance were claimed naturally by the Sufis as a result of physical deprivation, to the illiterate man it might have appeared as adequate proof of rapport with God. The main motive behind the performance of miracles by the Sufis was attraction and conversion of people into Islam. The Sufi saints appear to have realized the fact that the Indian masses could easily be attracted only by their faith in such supernatural feats. And so they practiced it, and achieved some success. Indian people must have thought that these Sufi saints had gained some divine powers which could bestow some comfort on them and remove their sorrows in life in a miraculous way.

This is substantiated by the findings of R. Soma Reddy who writes:

> "The saints were generally believed to have influence with God, and the ability to perform miracles like possessing extraordinary powers of blessing, healing and protective effect. Anything touched by them and handed over to the people was considered efficacious. People used to approach them seeking solution for their problems both spiritual and material." [21]

The masses held Sufi saints in high regard as they thought they had access to even the supreme God and could talk to Him on their behalf. Since everything touched by the saint became sacred and purified, people usually brought many material objects which might be kept with them as talismans, after purification by the Sufi master.

The adoration of Sufi saints led people only to worship them not only when they were alive, but also after they were dead, because people of those times believed that the saints, though dead physically, were alive in spirit-form looking after the welfare of the people with all strength and certainty. This show how people were mostly mislead even regarding worship during the period under study. It can be conjectured that, since people were under the Muslim rule and since the Muslim saints were ascribed some miraculous powers, people might have transferred their devotion to tombs in place of temples, whose sanctity was not so fresh in their minds.

For instance we might take the Babayya (Baba Fakhruddin) Dargah of Penukonda where Hindus and Muslims used to offer their prayers and this Dargah also received grants under the liberal patronage of the Vijayanagar rulers [22]. Besides this Soma Reddy also mentions many other Dargahs of different places, such as the Dargah of Baba Sharfuddin at Hyderabad which was credited to be the earliest Dargah in Andhra Pradesh, the Dargah of Kadi Zianuddin Multani and the Dargah of Syed Shah Jamal Bagdat at Warangal, the Dargah of Galib Shaheb at Rajkonda (Nalgonda dt.), the Dargah of Shah Ali Pasha etc. Some more examples have already been given in the third paper, and it has been shown how people of both the communities, i.e. Muslims and Hindus thronged to worship at the tombs of the Muslim saints, not only became the places of common worship for both the Muslims and the Hindus, but also served as centres where people of both communities, could develop cordial relations to a great extent.

We have epigraphical reference to a Dargah of a Muslim saint, which received grants from the Vijayanagar kings. Even at this Dargah people of different communities got together to offer their obeisance to the venerated saint. An inscription from Penukonda ascribed to the reign of Venkata II records the regaining of some villages originally belonging to the Dargah of a Muslim saint namely Babanath. Actually these villages were granted by Vira Narasimha, Sadasiva and Venkata I. This Dargah received great veneration from the people for its astrological forecasts and prognostications [22]. Another tomb which attracted the attention of the people was the tomb of Syed Shah Mastan Vali at Guntakal, where both the Muslims and Hindus hold the saint in reverence.

The main reason why these Dargahs or tombs became the shrines of common popular worship was, again the attitude of the people who flocked there only for material benefits in exchange for their prayers. The common people hoped to get children, hoped to get rid of incurable diseases, and thought their wishes would be fulfilled by offering their obeisance at these shrines [22].

The popularity of these Sufi saints gradually increased because, as people got benefits either material or spiritual, either real or imagined, from the worship of saints, their faith became firm and spread to the masses. Eventually this sort of deviation in devotional loyalty resulted in a gradual decrease in the importance attached to worship in Hindu temples. Because people seemingly gained some benefits from worship at tombs and Dargahs, they perhaps began to think that they could not get the same as readily from temple worship.

The foregoing material is enough to show how the Muslim impact was of a far-reaching nature, how it percolated down to the teeming millions and affected their daily ways of worship by making them adopt some Islamic practices into their very elastic fabric of traditional Hinduism.

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