

Sai Baba of Shirdi – A Sufi Saint of the Chisti Order

This article will explore Sai Baba's links with the Chisti Order of Sufis and discuss his spiritual predecessors and their beliefs. It will be seen that many of the sayings of Sai Baba can be traced back to his Sufi Saint Gurus (Auliya's) almost 800 years before him.

Sufism is the Mystical path of Islam. In Sufism the Guru plays a key role and the disciple merges with God through merging with his Guru. *Prayer at the Holy Shrine of the Guru's tomb is a key aspect of Sufism.* Sufism encourages respect for all Sufi saints with a focus on your chosen *Murshid* or Guru.

Sufism spread on the sub-continent of India essentially under the Chisti order starting from 12th century saint Hazrat Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti (Gharib Nawaz) of Ajmer. Chist is a small town in Afghanistan. Muinuddin was preceded by 200 years of Sufism in Chist. Muinuddin is said to have moved to India on the instructions of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in a dream vision.

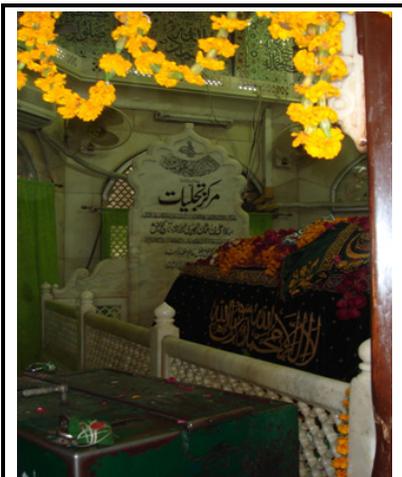


Hazrat Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti (Gharib Nawaz or Helper of the poor)

One of Muinuddin's first acts was to visit the holy shrine of the 11th century Saint *Al-Hujwiri* (Data Ganj-Baksh or "the giver who bestows treasure") in Lahore who belonged to the Junaidia school of Sufism which originated from Baghdad. Al-Hujwiri was the author of *Kashf al-Mahjub*¹ ("The Revelation of the Veiled"), the oldest Persian treatise on Sufism. This school believed in sober mysticism and that "True understanding of God should be a silent understanding".

Muinuddin was born in East Persia and his Guru was *Khwaja Usman Harooni* from Iran. His Guru's teachings were conservative and many were for the ascetic:

- He advised renunciation of the world, which he believed was the root of all evil.
- Renunciation is no easy task until the love of God reaches its highest pitch.



**Shrine of Hazrat Data
Ganj-Baksh**

¹ See "The Kashf Al-Mahjub" by Prof. Reynold A. Nicholson published in 1911 and available on Archive.org

- A man must spend his life in poverty, abstinence and hunger, he must have *humility and submission* because these are the most valuable assets in real worship and devotion, in order to know the way.
- A great man is one who is endowed with virtues like contentment, sincerity, self-abnegation, self-sacrifice and above all, spirit of renunciation.
- He said that the ego in a man was an enemy, as it did not allow him to think rationally, act wisely and live happily.
- He emphasised that unless a man loves human beings, it is impossible for him to love God.
- The one who feeds the hungry is dear to God. God fulfills a thousand wants and frees such a person from his sins.

“The lover of God should be charitable like the river, generous like the sun and hospitable like the earth. He indeed is close to God, who is ever steeped in His submission, Who interprets every event as coming from God, And who is content with it and who takes it as a blessing. This is the main object of all prayers and worship.”

While Khwaja Usman Harooni’s tomb lies in Mecca, there is also a symbol of his strength and source of his blessings at the Usmani Chilla at Ajmer.

Muinuddin preached a philosophy of love and tolerance which easily won him followers. His beliefs included:

- Love towards all, malice towards none.
- A sin committed does not harm an individual so much as looking down upon one’s own fellow human beings.
- Of all the worship that pleases Almighty Allah, the most is the granting of relief to the humble and the oppressed.
- Never turn your face from the right path of Sufism and Truth. Prove yourself to be a brave man in this Divine Mission.
- It was good deed and not knowledge which was really needed in the final relationship with God.

Muinuddin also says that there are four cardinal virtues of the individual self:

- I. Refraining from begging in the state of penury;
- II. Showing the attitude of being well-fed when feeling hungry;
- III. Maintaining a cheerfulness in the time of sorrow; and



Inside the Dargah, Ajmer Shareef

IV. Befriending the enemy.

The above is advise for a person who is living a normal householders life. *Nonetheless, Sufi saints in India often begged for their food and this was one key way to control and kill their ego.* Sufi principles also required that they should not accept more than they needed; anything more should be distributed to others.

Khawaja Qutbuddin Bakhtiar Kaki (Dehliwala)

Qutbuddin succeeded Muinuddin. He had no parallel in abandoning the world and suffering poverty and hunger. He kept himself engrossed in the remembrance of God (“*Dhikr*”). Whenever someone came to him he would come back to his senses after a while and was then able to talk with him. After a very brief exchange he would show his inability to continue any longer and slipped into the same state of absorption once again. He was habituated to eat little, sleep little and speak little. Death also came to him in an unusual manner. It is stated that once in an assembly of Sama [religious music] he happened to hear a Sufi verse with the meaning: “*Those who are killed with the dagger of surrender and pleasure (spiritual intoxication or “Wajd”) get a new life from the Unseen*”. Kaki was so much absorbed in and inspired with this verse that from that day on he kept on reciting it in a state of unconsciousness and gave his life in the same state. He remained in this state of spiritual intoxication for 3 consecutive days and expired on the 4th day. His Mazaar Sharif [noble tomb] is located in Delhi.



**Mazaar Sharif of Hazrat
Khwaja Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar
Kaki**

Sufis regards music and sama to be religiously permissible although *not indispensable* for the Sufi. *Sufis believed that indulgence in sama achieves more than long enduring penitence.* Sama is of two kinds - that sung to the accompaniment of musical instruments; and that sung without such instruments. Some Sufi’s life record shows that in their early life they listened to qawwali (the Urdu term for sama) with musical instruments, but switch over to qawwali without instruments as they advanced in age and spiritual experience. This may be explained by the fact that artificial “aid” such as musical instruments are apt to become redundant as spiritual elevation matures and stabilizes. Indeed, when the Saint attains the highest spiritual station of “*Mushahida*” (direct perception of the Supreme Being) and “*fana-e-kamil*” (complete

KEY SUFI PRINCIPLES

1. Attain God through your Guru – Guru is God.
2. Devotion to your Guru – constant remembrance is the path.
3. You may use devotional music to help strengthen your devotion.
4. God lies within you - you must kill your animal spirit (“Nafs” or ego).
5. Knowledge is not as important as direct spiritual experience.
6. Control your anger, lust and materialistic greed - control your mind.
7. Devotion and faith are the corner-stones.
8. As you start evolving your suffering initially increases to cleanse you.
9. Good and Bad mean different things as you evolve – the same rules don’t apply.
10. An evolved man will experience the results of his actions much faster (he who rises higher falls harder).
11. Your powers are not your own, they are as a result of the Grace of your Guru.
12. Tremendous courage is needed to be a Sufi.
13. Ultimately, you must conquer lust if you want to achieve God.

annihilation in Allah), they no longer remain in need of external factors for their advancement. Some Saints are known to rely on such factors even after attaining the aforesaid station but they do so for the benefit of their disciples (*Murid*) and not because they themselves need those. It is said that the Saints prayers during such a mystic state have tremendous powers and miracles can happen. Wajd is expected to be remembered forever and impacts how a person lives. Note however, that while sama can confer sublime benefits onto a person who seeks spiritual ends through it, it can, conversely, further excite the sportive thoughts and feelings of one who looks for his own brand of pleasure from it.

“If he, i.e., the listener, takes off in his flight from the tower of the inner “meanings” (i.e., the spirit or the truth), then the range of his flight will surpass even that of the Angels (through sama)”

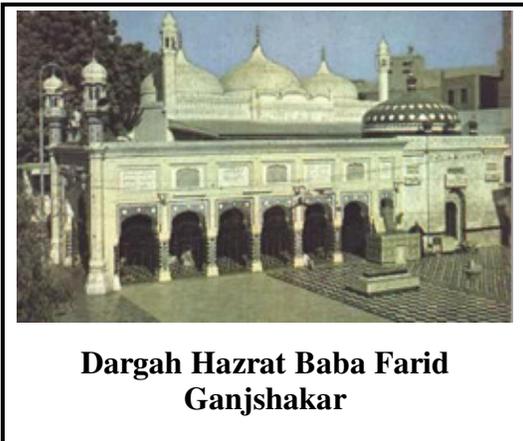
"If, on the other hand, he is one that loves fun, sport and meaningless things, these attributes will become stronger through sama"

Hazrat Baba Fariduddin Masood Ganjshakar (Baba Farid)

Baba Farid was Kaki’s spiritual successor. He lived and died in Pakpattan, Pakistan. He is considered one of the holiest and pivotal saints in Sikhism. Khawaja Nizamuddin Aulia (his successor) constructed his tomb. He had told Nizamuddin "Be like a big tree, so that Allah's creation, the human beings in their vast multitudes, may find rest and solace under your shadow."

To Baba Farid, Sufism was a strenuous exercise leading one to a pious life within the society in which one lived. It demanded humility, modesty, patience, fortitude and a cleansing of the heart from all conceit. Some of his sayings are given below:

- When there is greed, what love can there be?
When there is greed, love is false.
- Do not turn around and strike those who strike you with their fists.
- Whatever God gives cannot be taken away by anyone else.
- Escaping from the carnal self should be deemed as a means of reaching God.
- Do not eat every body’s bread, but give bread to everybody.
- Do not lower yourself in order to secure a position.
- Strive to obtain fresh grace everyday.
- Consider good health a divine blessing.
- Be grateful but do not compel others to be grateful to you.



- Always keep the doors of peace open in a war.
- Acquire knowledge through humility.
- Acquire wealth honestly in order to be able to retain it.

Poverty

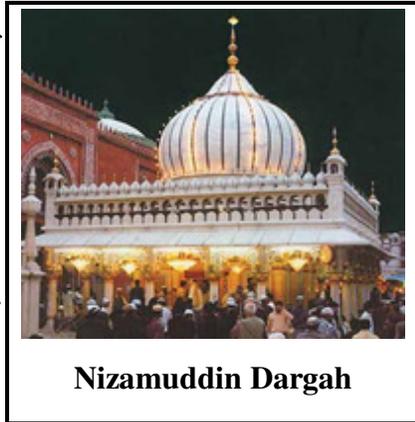
The issue of *Poverty* has been dealt with by Al-Hujwiri in his book “*Kashf al-Mahjub*” where he talks of a modern Sufi as saying “*The poor man is not he whose hand is empty of provisions, but he whose nature is empty of desires*”. For example, if God gives him money and he desires to keep it, then he is rich; and if he desires to renounce it, he is rich no less, because poverty consists in ceasing to act on one’s own initiatives.

Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya (Mehboob Ilahi)

Nizamuddin represents in many ways the pinnacle of the Chishti Order of the Sufis. Almost 100 years had passed since Muinuddin’s time.

Nizamuddin stressed on the motive of love, which leads to the realization of God. He extended his love of God to the love of humanity without which the former would be incomplete. With regard to the Sufi path, he said that "For a dervish (Sufi Muslim ascetic), three things are necessary. They all begin with an 'ain' (an Arabic letter), i.e., *Ishq* (love), *Aql* (intelligence) and *Ilm* (knowledge). His sayings include:

- The *wilayat* (domain) of gnosis (direct spiritual knowledge) and faith can suffer decay. The wilayat of compassion can not.
- The love of *Awlia* (saints) is stronger than their reason.
- He who has knowledge, reason, and love, is deserving to become a successor of the Guru.
- It is better to forgive than to subdue one's anger, for without forgiveness the repressed anger may become the cause of jealousy and revenge.
- It is good to repent and free yourself of your sins in youth, for in old age if you do not repent, what else will you do?
- The company we keep has a powerful influence on us.
- On the Day of Judgment nothing will be subject to greater interrogation than ones ability to provide solace to broken hearts. To hurt a human heart is to hurt the grace of Almighty Allah.
- This is quite common that people reciprocate good behavior with good, and bad with the bad. But the dervishes are good with the good but also good with the bad.



Nizamuddin Dargah

- A perfect man possesses four qualities of perfection: - Less Eating, Less sleeping, Less talking, Less meeting.

The Four Stages of Sufism:

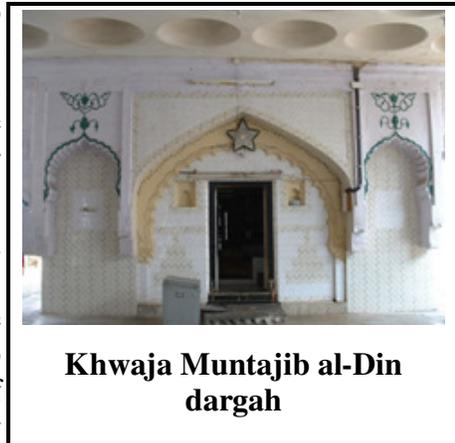
- 1) Purification of the self. This means cleansing the sensual self from its blamable, animal propensities and embellishing it with laudable and angelic attributes.
- 2) Cleansing of the heart. This means the erasing from the heart its love for the ephemeral world and its worry over grieves and sorrow, and establishing in their place an ardent love for God alone.
- 3) Emptying the innermost consciousness from all thoughts that would divert attention from the remembrance of God.
- 4) Illumination of the spirit. This means filling the spirit with the effulgence of God and the fervour of His love.

The end of this process is "*fana*" ("self-having passed-away"). Nizamuddin reached this status of *Mehboob* (beloved). His personality was the container of divine secrets and his intentions were in harmony with those of Allah. He spread a *very fine fragrance* on which he commented "this fragrance is of the love of Allah, which He gives to His lovers."

Sai Baba's Guru - Khwaja Muntajib al-Din (Zar Zari Zar-Bakhsh)

Nizamuddin wished to spread the Chisti message to new parts of India. He sent his disciple Zar Zari Zar-Bakhsh ("the giver of Gold") to Maharashtra in South, along with the entourage of 1400 Sufi divines. He settled in Khuldabad (called the Valley of Saints) near Aurangabad and died in 1309 AD.

Meher Baba, a disciple of Sai Baba, says that Sai Baba was the disciple of Zar Zari Zar-Bakhsh who was his spiritual master from a previous life. He meditated in the same hill cave that his Guru used to meditate in and became a perfect master by the age of 22 thanks to his Guru's grace. The lack of any contemporary account leaves his Guru in the fog of legend, forever beyond the grasp of our knowledge.



**Khwaja Muntajib al-Din
dargah**

Hazrat Tajuddin Baba – Sai Baba's Peer

Sai Baba has referred to Tajuddin Baba of Nagpur in his lifetime and regarded him with a lot of respect. Tajuddin was one of the Five Perfect Masters. He died in August 1925.

Meher Baba says that Sai Baba was the *Qutub e-Irshad* (the head) of the five Perfect Masters of the age.

Tajuddin's life followed the advise of another saint to him "Eat little, Talk little and Sleep little and recite the Holy Quran, rather than just recitation, think that as if it is being revealed to you."

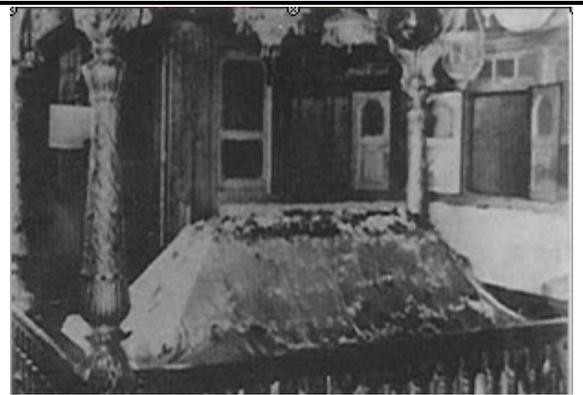
Tajuddin used to say "We give according to the seek of seeker".



Hazarat Tajuddin Baba and his Dargah

CONCLUSION

The Path of Sufism accepts people from *any religion* as followers of the Sufi master. To achieve God you have to unite with your Guru. To do this, control your lust, anger and materialistic greed. Listen to Sai Baba's Bhajans which are the equivalent of Sama. *Your longing for Baba should grow more and more intense –remember him in every moment of your life. Believe in him and his decisions for you – have faith even in adversity.* Once you've achieved control on your mind and your devotion and faith in Sai Baba is complete, his Grace will descend on you and that is the start of the Sufi process. At Baba's will he can make any devotee experience mystical states of consciousness ("*Hal*" i.e., *an excess of spiritual feeling ("Wajd")*), but he will do this only for the deserving.

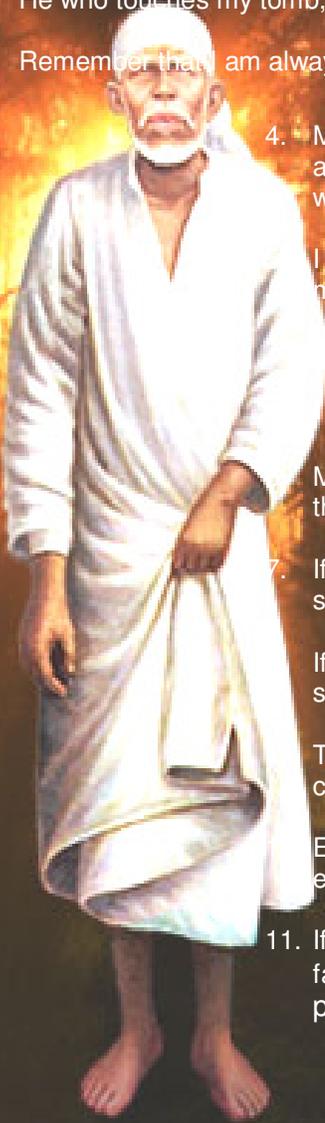


Shirdi Sai Baba Samadhi

Sai devotees must respect all the Sufi saints mentioned above as they are part of Baba's spiritual lineage. Nonetheless, their Guru is Sai Baba alone and he is the sole objective of their lives. His ways are unique and his prescription tailored for each devotee. Lastly, he never considered himself a Hindu or a Muslim.

Eleven Assurances of Baba

1. Whosoever puts their feet on Shirdi soil, their sufferings will come to an end.
2. He who touches my tomb, all his suffering shall cease.
3. Remember that I am always aware of everything you do.
4. Meditate upon me, chant my name and sing my deeds. Your devotion will increase and karma destroyed.
5. I love devotion, he who loves me most always sees me.



Faith and Patience

Make me the sole object of your thoughts and aims to attain God.

7. If you cast your burden on me, I shall surely bear it.

If you seek my advice and help, it shall be given to you at once.

There will be no want of food or clothing in the house of my devotee.

Even after I cast off this body, I shall ever come to the help of my devotee.

11. If you look to me, I look to you. Keep faith in me, I will answer your prayers.

Allah Malik Hai!