**Sufi politics in Pakistan-I**

[M Aamer Sarfraz](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/m-aamer-sarfraz/" \o "More Articles by M Aamer Sarfraz)

APRIL 15, 2019

Religion refers to following one type of belief system, and religious politics usually means aiming to govern by religious lawsin a theocratic state.Modern understanding of Sufismrefers to a subjective experience of a sacrosanct dimension,and associated ethics and ideals by which people choose to live in a framework which is different from organised religion. Sufi politics in essence would be a mindful and fair governancefor the welfare of masseswhich is in harmony with individual freedomin a progressiveenvironment.

It is hard to imagine politics and Sufism together and many believe that they should be kept far apart. Nonetheless, politics was a part of most organised religions at some stage, and their founders had mystical experiences which formed the basis of their teachings. Sufism relates to a relationship with a realm beyond self, either through a belief that science will eventually provide all the answers, or by devouringan inner craving for a connexion with some power beyond self. If politics is about opinions and activism as they relate to the policies of the governments, these opinions and activism must emanate from ideas and attitudes towards life, whichcan only originate from our nonphysical being.

*Sufi politics in the subcontinent entered with the sages who spread Islam in medieval India. It were the Sufi orders, not the Turk-Afghan warriors or state-sponsored Ulama, who inspired mass conversions to Islam*

Historically, Sufism was like Sunni quietism, which had accepted monarchyas guided by the religious doctrineendorsed by al-Ghazali (d. 1111). In the thirteenth century, the concept of inner government or hukumah batiniyah was invented as a part of spiritual khilafah, which was supposed to have carried out the trueresponsibilities of government behind a Sultan. This may have been derived from the status of Sufis at the court, where their presence provided moral legitimacy to the regime.The rise of the West in the eighteenth century threw up unique regional and cerebral challenges for the Muslims. After the conquest of Mecca by the Wahhabis (1804), pilgrims also started returning from the Hajj to propagate a new Pan-Islamic mindfulness. Some Sufi orders (tariqahs) provided resourceful channels for these ideas and got politicized in the process. As this Sufi activism entered the twentieth century, it provided inspiration to visibly secular political movements.

Sufi politics in the subcontinent entered with the sages who spread Islam in medieval India.It were the Sufi orders, not the Turk-Afghan warriorsor state-sponsored Ulama, who inspired mass conversions to Islam. Ibn Battuta, the celebrated Arab explorer, was astounded by the power of the Sufis in the court of Sultans. Their involvement in politics was both at individual and communal levels. Mostly, the Orders took a particular sideagainst an established order, or in support of a ruling power.Although they were eclipsed by the Ulama in the Mughal period (1526-1739), they continued to exert influence over their political masters and Qazis who were sympathetic to them.The Mughal emperors did extend royal patronage to the Nakshbandis, whose founder was the ancestral Pir of the House of Taimur.

The Chishti order has always seen itself as the patron saints of the Muslim rulers in India. During the reign of Shah Jahan (d. 1659), `Abd al-Rahman Chishti evoked the hukumah batiniyah in preachingthat Chishtiyah were the sole protectors of the emperor’s life, with responsibility for the survival of their kingdom.Perhaps the most interesting figure of the time was Ahmad Sirhindi (d. 1624)Naqshbandi, who successfully got the innovative trends of the court of Akbarreversed as Aurangzeb preferred a more orthodox Islamic outlook than his predecessors. Sirhindi not only wrote letters to the political figures of his time to exert his influence, but also suffered imprisonment (1619-1620) by Jahangir for his convictions. The study of his Maktubat was prohibited by Aurangzeb, party because of his claim to be the Qayyum, the maintainer of the cosmic order. However, three of his successors also claimed this status-Muhammad Ma’sum (d. 1668), Hujjat Allah Naqshband (d. 1702), and Muhammad Zubayr (d. 1740).

The death of Aurangzebleft a power vacuum in the Mughal empire, and some landowner Sufis rose against the regional authorities who had lukewarm royal support. Khawaja Mir Dard (d. 1785), who combined Naqshbandi ascetism with poetry and music, came to prominence in those days. He was criticized for this by his contemporaries but he founded the Muhammadiyah order whose members were advised to assist the rulers with prayers, dubbing them as Lashkar-i- Du’a or “the army of prayer makers”.The Naqshbandi Shah Wali Allah (d. 1763) re-started the crusade of Sirhindi by writing to the Emperor and government officials for political and financial reforms. He also appealed to the Afghan King Ahmad Shah Abdali to save India from meltdown. Abdali did arrive, but only to loot, and then leave. The political component of Shah Wali Allah’s work survives in the School of Deoband, but without his Sufi perspective.

Sufi writers of the post-Mughal period wrote essaysvenerating monarchy as equal to or even superior to prophecy. Najm al-Din Razi (d. 1256) actually claimed that a righteous king is a true vice-regent of God, and exhibits the divine attributes of His lordship. Likewise, Husayn Kashifi (d. 1504) rated kingship as equal in some respects to prophethood.