

Sufism in India: Notes for IAS Exam

Sufism is an important concept that influenced religion in India in the medieval ages. There are many Sufi saints whose Dargahs still attract people from all over the country irrespective of their religious affiliation. In this article, you can read a short note on the important points in Sufism for the IAS exam.

Sufism is a mystical form of Islam, a school of practice that focuses on the spiritual search for God and shuns materialism. It is a form of Islamic mysticism which stresses on asceticism. There is a lot of emphasis on love and devotion towards God. There are many schools of Sufism all over the world and in India too. Most of them trace their lineage to early Islamic history, from the time of Prophet Muhammad himself.

The term 'Sufi' is probably derived from the Arabic 'suf' word which means 'one who wears wool'. This is because woollen clothes were generally associated with ascetics. Another possible origin of the word is 'safa' which means purity in Arabic.

Sufism in India

Islam entered India in the 7th century CE in the form of merchants from Saudi Arabia who traded with the western coastal regions of India. After that in the north, the religion entered Multan and Sind when the regions were captured by Muhammad Bin Qasim in the 8th century CE. Sufism, however, gained prominence in the 10th and 11th centuries during the reign of the Delhi Sultanate.

In India, Sufism adopted many native Indian concepts such as yogic postures, music and dance. Sufism found adherents among both Muslims and Hindus.

There were two broad Sufi orders:

1. Bashara - Those who obeyed Islamic laws.
2. Beshara - Those who were more liberal.

There were **twelve silsilas** or orders under the Bashara. The most important ones were Chisti, Suhrawardi, etc.

The Beshara was also called 'mast kalandar'. They comprised of wandering monks who were also called Baba. They did not leave any written accounts.

Chishti Order (Chishtiyah)

- Originated in Persia and Central Asia.

- The first saint was Abu Ishaq Shami. He established this order in Chishti-i-sharif in Afghanistan. He died in 940 CE.
- The most important saint was **Moinuddin Chishti**, who died in 1236 in Ajmer. His resting place is the **Ajmer Sharif Dargah** in Ajmer, Rajasthan.
- He made this order very popular in India, this continues to this day.
- Another important saint of this order was **Nizamuddin Auliya** (who died in 1335 at Delhi).
- Saints of this order mingled with people freely and led austere lives.

Suhrwardi Order

- Founded by Abdul-Wahid Abu Najib as-Suhrawardi.
- Leaders of this order were also rich and held important government positions.
- A famous saint is Bahauddin Zachariah.

Other important orders are Kubrawiya, Naqshbandi, Mawlawiyya, Qadiri, etc.

Important Sufi Terms in India

- Sufi, Pir, Murshid - Saint
- Murid - Followers
- Khanqah - Place where Sufis lived, hospices
- Khalifa - Disciples
- Zikr - Recitation of God's name
- Tauba - Repentance
- Fanaa - Spiritual merging with the Almighty
- Urs - Death
- Sama - Musical gathering