

# THE SUFI TRADITION

DR. B.L. MALLA

Sufism is akin to mysticism. Much before the advent of Islamic culture (and Sufism) in India, mysticism existed in Buddhist philosophy, *Hatha Yogic* System, Vedantic thought, Vaishnava tradition and at a much later stage in Bhakti movement, a very strong wave had emerged in the form of Sikh spiritualism in Punjab.

IGNCA hosted a three-day seminar on "The Sufi Tradition" from January 2-4. The objective of the seminar was to discuss the all-round impact of Sufism-not merely on the religious aspect but also on the life and culture in India. The seminar was inaugurated by Prof. Siraj Hussain. Vice-Chancellor, Jamia Hamdard, New Delhi. Nearly 25 scholars participated in the discussions. Dr. L.M. Singhvi, President IGNCA Trust, was among those who shared their views in the seminar.



Inauguration of the Seminar



A view of the participants

Sufi literally means 'one who is pure.' In Greek, Sufi is an enlightened person. Sufism was born in Arabia, very early in Islamic history. The Sufis came to India following the Muslim conquerors. India, with her multi-racial, multi-religious and multi-lingual society has always welcomed men imbued with high moral and spiritual ideas who could, in the words of Tagore, "set at naught all differences of men, by the overflow of their consciousness of God". The Sufi saints of India belong to this category of "Good-conscious men" who stood above all narrow and parochial divisions of society and strove to find a unity for the heterogeneous elements that make up its totality.

The Arabs laid stress on asceticism and disciplining of the body, while the later Sufis in Iran and India, under the influence of Greek philosophy, Platonic ideology, Christian faith, Vedantist thinking, Buddhist lore, etc. believed in leading an emotionally rich life. They wrote poetry, read it aloud in the *Dayars* (Circles), sang and danced. They had faith in God; they loved the Prophet but they maintained that the *Murshid* or *Guru* could also lead to realization of the Divine Reality. The Indian Sufis laid stress on repeating the holy name (*Jaap*), concentration (*Dhyan*) and mediation (*Habs-i-dam*). Sufi maintained that the soul has been separated from the Divine Reality and supreme mission of human life is to achieve re-union with God. They believed that there are four stages in one's journey to realization: (a) leading a disciplined life as prescribed in Islam (*Shariat*); (b) following the path delineated by the *Murshid* or *Guru* (*Tariqat*); (c) attaining enlightenment (*Haqiqat*); (d) on realization of truth, getting merged into Divine Reality (*Mariat*).

The Sufis believe that God exists in all and all exist in God. Religion is only a way of life; it does not necessarily lead to liberation. It is *Murshid* (*Guru*) whose grace shows the way and leads to union with God. All happenings take place only as per the Will of God. It is the faith of the Sufis that the soul is distinct from the physical body and will merge into Divine Reality according to a person's deeds.

Sufism in India was not confined to influencing a specific place or a shrine or a mosque and its units. Its impact was felt on the culture of the people, on the entire interlocking aspects such as environmental, geographical, social, economic, artistic and devotional. The seminar provided a forum for a creative and critical dialogue on the Indian Sufi tradition in general and art and culture in particular. At the conclusion of the seminar the participants agreed that there was an immediate need for the holistic studies of different Sufi centres having secular and value based traditions. They also mooted the idea of an international seminar of scholars, social activists and practicing Sufis. It many greatly contribute to social harmony and peaceful co-existence, and also help in identifying Sufism as a discipline. Believing in mysticism and teachings of tolerance the Sufis may help in bringing peace and security at National and International level. The concluding remarks at the seminar were given by Khwaza Hasan Sani Nizami of Dargah Sahib, Nizamuddin.