Research Paper Commerce

# Nimatullahi Sufism and Deccan Bahmani Sultanate

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**ABSTRACT**

The presentresearch paper is aimed to determine the relationship between the Nimatullahi Shiite Sufi dervishes and Bahmani Shiite Sultanate of Deccan which undoubtedly is one of the key factors help to explain the spread of Sufism followed by growth of Shi'ism in South India and in Indian sub-continent. This relationship wasmutual andin addition to Sufism, the Bahmani Sultanate has also benefited from it. Furthermore, the researcher made effortto determine and to discuss the influential factors on this relation and its fruitful results. Moreover, a brief reference to the history of Muslims in India which seems necessary is presented.

**KEYWORDS** Nimatullahi Sufism, Deccan Bahmani Sultanate, Shiite Muslim, India

**Introduction:**

Islamic culture has entered in two ways and in different eras in the Indian subcontinent. One of them was the gradual arrival of the Muslims aroundeighth century in the region and perhaps the Muslim merchants came from southern and western Coast of Malabar and Cambaya Bay in India who spread Islamic culture in Gujarat and the Deccan regions and they can be considered asthe pioneers of this movement.

Of course, many factors helped the development of Islam in India which continued seriously from the second century AD including the simple religious laws and liberal beliefs of Islam for social organization particularly in those different parts of India which were undergoing crisis and unrest at that time. The arriving of peaceful Arab traders who were not only never seek political power, but also had helped the prosperity and well-being of the people,the vicinity to those countries in which the wave of Islamismwas formedsuch as Iran that was connected to the south of the Indian subcontinent via the sea and also the defined caste system in the Hindu tradition whichhelped Islam by equality and fraternity slogan to have a great popularity among the lower classes of Indian society in order to liberate them from their class and cast system.

Of other ways in which Muslims could have more influence in the subcontinent were military invasions sometimes in small groups and sometimes in large dimensions such as Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni's conquests which took place in the fourth century.

Meanwhile, Shia Muslims came to this region along with other and perhaps the initial stepof Shiite Islam to the subcontinentcan be traced back in Ghurid (Shansabānā) Dynasty. Thisdynasty was appointed to govern Ghor area bythe Caliph of Muslims' order, Imam Ali's (PBUH) and were persisting on the Shia in such a way that rejected andrefused the conventional substation of the Ahl-i-Beit (PBUH) duringUmayyad period.

This presence was increased in the third century ADwith the migration of one of the descendants of Imam Ali (PBUH) from Hijaz to Multan. This group has established links with local rulers and increased Shiitesin the Indian subcontinent;thiswas continued until finally this group joined the Ismailia and they exterminated by Sultan Mahmoud of Ghazni in the fifth century AD and then continued in the form of Sufism. (Nejati Hosseini 4)

Therefore, the presence of Sufis in India can be definitely considered until the fifth century and the proof is Ibn Battuta'sreport in the eighth century through hispassage to Malabarwhish shows the Sufi Muslim shrines and monasteries that are attributable the presence of Iranian Ascetics in Kalkot and Kollam Ports. (Battuta 575) However, one of the major and important factors that influence the development of Sufism in the subcontinent was the Shiite rule of Bahmani Sultanate in Deccan which is discussed briefly in this research paper.

**Discussion:**

One of the periods of Muslim attacks to south India which formed the Bahmani Sultanate and government in Deccan was Muslim attacks in the period of Sultan Alauddin Khilji (Reign: 1296-1316) which finally gained fruitafter twenty to thirty years in the Muhammad bin Tughluq (Reign: 1325–1351) and all this land was conquered by the Sufi Muslims.

Meanwhile, Deccan was one of the important parts of south Indiawhich was always considered by Muslims and the cultural and religious growth especially Sufism can be observed in the region.

Factors such as Muhammad bin Tughluq's violence and crackdown towards the citizens of India in the south,the shift of the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad of Deccan,forceful migration of people to that city and the weakness of the rule of Muhammad bin Tughluq in the final decade of his rule had led tothe independence of this region and consequently provided the establishment of the rule of Shiite Bahmani Sultanate.

The pioneer of the independence of Deccan can be considered as Hassan GanguBahmani. He was among the Afghans who served the Tughluqi Sultans in Delhi. As commander, he was called"Zafar Khan". Aladdin Bahman Shah introduced himself name afterBahman's progeny (Artaxerxes), son of Esfandiar, of the mythological kings of Iran.He was called "Abu'l Muzaffar Bahman Shah". In Friday 24 Rabi al-Thani in the year 748 AH, hefounded Bahmani Dynasty by conquering Daulatabad city after mobilizing troops and support of other commanders.

After him, seventeen of his sonshad ruled Deccan for about one hundred eighty years. Of them, eight had resided in Gulbarga city.

During Bahmani Sultans who were considered as Shi'ite rulers, many scholars and Sufis from Iran and other Islamic countrieshad migrated to Deccan and even some of them found the top political and administrative positions.

It must be said that the migration of Iranian Sufis and scholars to India had took place from a long time ago, but it was added to this migration in this time. Various reasons including po-

litical violence and crackdown of ruling governments on Shiite people in Muslim lands, Muslims invasion to India and their conquests, andthe formation of Muslim government particularly Shiite of governments at this time that strengthening the position of the Shiites in the area,Moghul invasion tolranthat took place in the seventh to the thirteenth centuryand led to the migration of thousands of scholars, artists and Sufis to India, the Indian kings' welcome and support of immigrants, the anarchy and terrible internal conditions especially in Iran whichcontinued from the late Safavid to the Qajar era,the confrontation between Sufis and jurists in the Safavid period and after that, the Uzbeks' attacks on Iran who were Sunni rulers and had harsh clashes with Sufis and Shiite clerics,and finally, the Iranian-Islamic culture could position these great thinkers in Bahmani Sultanate and later rules such as Adilshahi, Qutubshahi, and Nizamshahi where they reached top governmental positions.

The relationship between Sufis and Bahmani Sultanate was a mutual relationship; since Sufis made use of thelibertyfor their advertisement in theiropen government and Bahmani kings were also benefited from the Sufis to legitimize their rule.

As mentioned,mysticism had been there in Deccan before the establishment of the Bahmani Sultanate in the Deccan which had entered India via sea and from north; Sufis who were fromQadiriyya, Chistiyya and Junaidiyya Sufi dynasties.

The Sufis were under pressure at the time of Muhammad ibn Tughluq and under the influence of Ibn Taymiyyah jurists in his rule;especially when he shifted his capital from Delhi to the Deogiri city and called it Daulatabad later. Consequently, in this regard,he brought many Sufis along with scientists thereand this led to many clashes in the teachings of migrated Sufis and the Sufis living there in Daulatabad. Over time, these problems were solved by the Sufis. Consequently, at the time of formation of the Bahmani Sultanate, Daulatabad and Khalidabad cities were the gathering places of many prominent Qadiri, Chisti and Junaidi Sufis. (Masomi 163)

At the time of the establishment of Bahmani Sultanate, thisrule turned to Sufi for some reasonsand considered a special place for their dignity and position; the lack of government reliance on jurists due to their dependence on the former governments, the special place that Sufis had found due to their extensive advertisement and their good manners with people and due to their exile by Tughluqis, (Mirkhord 101-303) as well as their fighting against inequality and discrimination and their effort in hospitality (Shah 18-28), which forced Bahmani Sultanate to consider them in order to legitimize their new government and the spiritual affiliations that some kings of this dynasty had towards the great Sufis elders had played an important role in this pursuit.

For this reason it can be said that the Sufis had formed the main religious, political, and social pillars of this government. In fact, they were considered as the link between the government and the people.

Of course, it should be noted that the interaction of Bahmani kings with Sufis and vice versa was different at different times and sometimesthis relationship was so close that,in addition to family ties, Bahmani sultans visited Sufi sheikhs in their monastery and even received the prediction of theirissues. (Tabataba 12)

On the one hand, and tasks, Sufis involved in relations and the governmental and administrative duties; In contrast, some of the time, this relationship reached its minimum and the Sufis not only did not enter government worksbut also refused to accept kings' donations or accepted them reluctantly. But sometimes they stood against the excesses of kings and ignoring their religious laws and retained their independence in religious affairs.

Bahmani Sultanate's relations with different of Sufi sects especially with Chishti Order and Seyed Mohammad Gesu Daraz who was considered of its great figures and was respected by Bahmani sultans continueduntil the accession of Ahmed I, the ninth king of Bahmani dynasty; Ahmed Ishifted the capital from Gulbarga to Bidar after his accession which its useful results were mentioned earlier and gathered the social forces and his commanders who were often of Afaqis and thus increased their numbers compared to Dakhnis (Deccanis).

The death of the greatest supporters of his reign, Gesu Daraz was considered as a heavy loss for him. After the death of Gesu Daraz,he came looking for a great Sufi to relay on him in order to raise the people's support of himself after the death of his great patron. Thisseparationwas a mystical belief he had. Perhaps for this reason,heprevented Sheikh Azeri's migration, the poet laureate of the court, fromBidar to Esfarain and requested him to stay in Bidardue to his sadness and grief of the death of Gesu Daraz and not to increase his grief by leaving Bidar. (Fereshteh 325)

For achieving his demands, Ahmad I followed Sufis whowere consistent with the people from religious, ethnic and racial point of view in order tomaintain his influence andattract Afaqi kingsin his rule. Therefore,he turned to Iran and since he was familiar with that country's famous Sufi, Shah Nematollah (834-730) by Nizamudin Farooqi, also known as Sheikh Khojan, (Vaezi 288-308) he sent Sheikh Habibullah Junaidiwho was the Sayed Nematollah's disciplealong with Mir Shams al-Din Qomi and a group of elders with gifts and presents toSayed Nematollah in Kerman to convey the King'sdevotion to himand invite him to visit Deccan. (Masoom Alishah 12)

As it mentioned earlier, Ahmed I found great devotion to him in addition to the interest of the rule as far as he ordered towrite and to mention SeyedNematollah's name over his speeches and commands. And even in the year 833 AD, just a year before the death of Shah Nematollah, the Deccani kingaccepted Shiite religion and changed the Bahmani Sultanate official religion which until then was Sunni but with Tafazolibelief to Shiite. This had provideda very fertile ground for the emergence of Shia and its ritual sentences later, especially in the end of the Bahmani Sultanate period. (Nejati Hosseini14)

Shah Nematollah also sent Mula Qutb al-Din Kermani to Deccan who was one of his disciples. Ahmad Shah who had not yet fulfilled his demands sent Khwaja Imad al-Din Semnani and Saifollah Hassan Abadi to Shah Nematollahand request the presence one of his progeny there (Masoom Alisha 13), but Shah Nematollah did not agree to send Sayed Khalil Allah, his only son due to his devotion but instead he sentone of his descendants named Mirza Noorollah to Ahmad Shah's court.

Deccan Sultan with all the princes exitedBidar city to welcome and to embrace Noorollah and accompanied him with respect to the cityand even founded a village named Nematabadat his meeting with him andgranted him the title of"Malak ul-Mashayekh" (King of Elders) (Tabataba12), which itself indicates the position of this dynasty for Sultan Ahmed.

Mirza Noorollah due to lack of familiarity with the political and social situation in the Deccan,lack of awareness of the Deccani language, lack of communication with people and societyand lack of influence and impact on the Afaqis rulers could not provide the Deccan Sultanate's aimsand only met the Sufi interests of the Sultan. Therefore, Ahmad Shah focusedhis attention to Shah Nematollah and sent numerous gifts forNematollah monastery costs to Kerman. (Bafqi Mostowfi 37-45).Of course, this devotion or relation was not one way but mutual andShah Nematollahallowed the Sultan to achieve the honor to be one of his disciples. (Kermani 307)

Shah Nematollah died in Kerman in 834 AD and Ahmad I made lots of efforts in his funeral and built Shah Nematollah's tomb in Mahan, Kerman which was completed during Ahmad Shah II's period. (Farzam 184)

After the death of Shah Nematollah, his son Syed Burhan UddinKhalilollah who was fifty-nine years old became the leader of Nimatullahi dynasty. After Deccani king's much insistences, heleave his son Mir ShahShamseddin Hosseini on behalf of himself inMahan, Kerman and he traveled to Bidar along with his two other sons namely Mohib al-DinHabibullah and Mir Habib al-DinMohibullah and a group of devotees.

The news of their arrival to Bidar had been reached to Shah Noorollah, Syed Burhan Uddin other sonearlier in the Deccanand they warmly welcomed by the people and the king. From the beginning, the kinship relationship established with the Deccan court and Habibullah became Ahmad Shah's son in law and Mohibullah became Ahmad II's son in law. Such kinship marriagescontinued among Nimatullahi Sufi dynastyand royal family during Bahmani Sultans periods. (Tabataba 81-138) and this was one of the reasons for strengthening relations of the Sufis with the rule.

From their arrival into the Deccan, Nimatullahi Sufis hadadopted a different method than other Sufis and participated seriously in the executive and the governmentalissues. For example, Habibullah was competent commander in combatsand gave many services to the Bahmani Sultanateand even he wasentitled'the iconoclast'. (Masoom Alishah93)

The respect that Nimatullahi Sufis has among the people and the nobility,was more due to their ties to the dynasty than their spiritual interests and this reputation and respect extended and progressed to other lands particularly Iran and led to themigration of the prompted scientists, poets and many of the Iranian Sufis to the Deccanand increased the Afaqispopulation in the Deccan.

Perhaps the most famous person who wanted to join Shah Mohibullah and migrated from Iran to Deccan was Mahmoud Gavan. Khwaja Mahmoud Gavan was considered as one of the great Gilani scholars of his time who was a businessman and due tohis close relationship with Shah Mohibullah was considered and interested by Deccanisultans.

He entered the court of Bahmani Sultanate during Ahmad Shah IIand reached the position of the Ministry at the end of Homayoun Shah Bahmani period. After the death of Homayoun Shah and the coronation of his brother, Mohammad Shah, who was only ten years old,Khwaja Jahan Turk and-Khwaja Mahmud Gawan ruled the government under the supervision of the Sultan's mother. The Khwaja Jahan Turk's immoderation in dismisses and grants of the rulers and laxity in parrying Mahmoud Khalaji's attackscaused Sultan Muhammad by his mother's orderissued his death warrant in 870 AH. Furthermore, by the Sultan's mother withdrew from politics, Khwaja Mahmoud became the sole power in practice. (Hendushah 347)

By the several victories on the western borders, he improved the economy of Deccanand formed a united governmentby regulating the administrative system and reduced the power of the local governors. (Hendushah 356)

Khwaja Mahmoud's power has increased to the point thatafter his death and the transfer of power to the Deccani rulers and the clashes between Deccanis and Afaqis, the Bahmani Sultanate had went downhill and the authority of their rule was ended.

Due to the authority in controlling the rule on one hand and due to his interests in Sufis, especially the Nimatullahi Sufis, hemade important contributions to them in his period. As far as, his close relations with Sufis such as Sheikh Sadr al-Din Rawasy, Khwaja Ubaidullah Ahrar, Rumi, Jami and even his invitation for them to come to Deccan are recorded history.

Sultan Quli Qutub Shahis was another person who was considered as a Shah Nimatullahi disciple inDeccan and played a key role in the balance of power. He was the founder of the Qutub Shahis dynasty.

He was a survivorof Aq-Qoyunlus who came to India with precious gifts after the extinction of their rule in 883 AD by Aq-Qoyunlus to make progress supported by Deccan Bahmani Kings. Sultan Quli came to the court of Muhammad Shah Bahmani IIIand passed successful positions due to his skill in accounting and the art of calligraphy and since Deccani kingsrespected Turks.

At the end of the reign of Sultan Mohammad Bahmani by the landowners' rebellion and thelocal people of Telangana and his repression by the rulers, Quli seized the opportunity and was ready to suppress the rebellionandwas able to conquer it. After the death of Sultan Mohamed III and the loss of Bahmani Sultanate power in that region, he declared the independence and established theQutub Shahis rule there in 918 AD. (Sadeghi Alavi 28)

Furthermore,Due to their Irani and Shi'ite background andthe Sufiinterests and admiration of Shah Nematollah Vali,Qutub Shahis had made too much efforts for the development of their ideas and beliefs. And of course, due to the same ethnicity with Safavid Turks, they had established good politicalties with them as far as they mentionedShah Ismail Safavid's name in the sermons. (Saedi Shirazi 81) If we considered these close relations besides the influence of Irani Nematollahis in the Safavid court and even kinship relations with the Safavid dynasty, the open advertising spacefor Nimatullahi Sufis can be partly realized.

Nimatullahi Sufis, due to their particular respect in the court, in the army and among the people,actively participatedin all political, social and military issues and they had played key roles in almost all issues including the coronation of Deccani kings by the Nimatullahi elders' hand. (Tabataba 75-123) These Sufis played the important role so thattheir no allegiance to new king, could undermine his reign and people'sdisbelief.

Of other important roles of Nematollahis at the Bahmani's court was the balances of power between the two Deccanis and Afaqisgroupsthat sometimes led toAfaqis overcome on Deccanis by the Shiite immigration and empowerment in the ruleand sometimes by fighting against Bahmani sultans to maintain the balancelike Habibullah's riot, son of Khalilollah, Shah Nematollah Vali's grandson against Homayoun Shah and the selection of Hassan Khan, his younger brother to the thronewhich ultimately led to Habibullah's murderer. (Fereshte 339-343)

In addition to all the mentioned played roles in the political, social, economic and cultural environments, the rise of the Nimatullahi Sufis in India hadtwo important cultural result; expansion of the activities of this group of Sufis in the complaint environment with them let to promote the growth of the Shia in the south of India. Moreover, in addition to attraction of nativeIndians to Shiite religion, it helped the migration a large number of Shiites to the region and Shia still selected and remained as the official religion in some rules of the regionsuntil the breakdown of Bahmani Sultanate.

On the other hand, Iranians interested in this dynasty, made major contributions to the promotion of the Persian language in this region. The proof of this fact is the oldest Persian text that Abdul Aziz ibn Shir Malik Vaezias a treatise entitled "The life and Works of Shah Nematollah Vali" had written and offered to Ahmad Shah II. (Sadeghi Alavi 34)

Shah Khalil Allah died almost twenty years after his immigration to Deccan. After him, eight of his grandsonsreached to the great position ofNimatullahi disciples that their history is unknown and ambiguous. (Soltani Gonabadi 152-153)

After this period, the guidance on the path of Nimatullahi discipleswent out from Shah Nematollah's generation. The lead-

ership of this dynasty reached to Sheikh Mahmoud Deccani (d. 1100 AH), Sheikh Sham-e-Din Deccani (d. 1160 AH) and Reza Ali Shah Deccani (d. 1215 AH) respectively. Two of the elders of the Reza Ali Shah time namely Syed Mir Abdul Hamid Masoom Ali Shah Mir and Seyed Tahir ShahDeccani were sent to Iran to spread Nimatullahi Sufism by his command and a new chapter in the life of this dynasty had begun after a period of prolonged power in Iran.

**Conclusion:**

It can be concluded that the gradual import of Islam followed by Shiite Islam in the Indian subcontinent in the first centuries AD,the mutual relationship between Nimatullahi Sufismand Bahmani Sultanate that was considered as Shia rules ofthat land,has caused additional progress and development of Shi'ism in India. Furthermore,in this interaction, in addition to the legitimacy of the rule via this relation among the people which was considered as the government's important interest in this issue, it has brought countless and fruitful political, economic, social and cultural developments for the Nimatullahi Sufis including occupying various governmental positionsfrom ministerial to authority ranks, the economic prosperity bytheir implemented programs, the expansion of Persian language in the country and the creations of important works of literature, art and religion to name few.

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