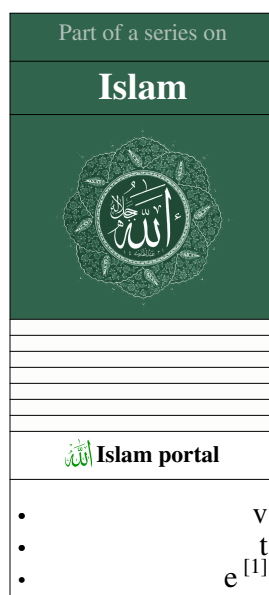


Chishti Order



The **Chishtī Order** (Persian: چشتی - *Čištī*) (Arabic: ششتی - *Shishti*) is a Sufi order within the mystic Sufi tradition of Islam. It began in Chisht, a small town near Herat, Afghanistan about 930 CE. The Chishti Order is known for its emphasis on love, tolerance, and openness.^[2]

The Chishti Order is primarily followed in Afghanistan and South Asia. It was the first of the four main Sufi orders (Chishti, Qadiriyya, Suhrawardiyya and Naqshbandi) to be established in this region. Moinuddin Chishti introduced the Chishti Order in Lahore (Punjab) and Ajmer (Rajasthan), sometime in the middle of the 12th century AD. He was eighth in the line of succession from the founder of the Chishti Order, Abu Ishq Shami. There are now several branches of the order, which has been the most prominent South Asian Sufi brotherhood since the 12th century.^[3]

In the last century, the order has spread outside Afghanistan and South Asia. Chishti teachers have established centers in the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia and South Africa. Devotees include both Muslim immigrants from South Asia and Westerners attracted to Sufi teachings.

Guiding principles

The Chishti are perhaps best known for the welcome extended to seekers who belong to other religions. Chishti shrines in South Asia are open to all faiths and attract great crowds to their festivals.

The Chishti shaykhs have also stressed the importance of keeping a distance from worldly power.^[4] A ruler could be a patron or a disciple, but he or she was always to be treated as just another devotee. A Chishti teacher should not attend the court or be involved in matters of state, as this will corrupt the soul with worldly matters. In his last discourse to his disciples, Khawaja Moinuddin Chishti said:

“Never seek any help, charity, or favors from anybody except God. Never go the court of kings, but never refuse to bless and help the needy and the poor, the widow, and the orphan, if they come to your door.”

Chishti believe that this insistence on otherworldliness differentiates them from Sufi orders that maintained close ties to rulers and courts, and deferred to aristocratic patrons.

Chishti practice is also notable for *sama*: evoking the divine presence through song or listening to music.^[5] Some Muslims believe that music is haram; forbidden to Muslims. The Chishti, as well as some other Sufi orders, believe that music can help devotees forget self in the love of Allah. However, the order also insists that followers observe

the full range of Muslim obligations; it does not dismiss them as mere legalism, as some strands of Sufism have done.^[6] The music usually heard at Chisti shrines and festivals is qawwali.

Practices

The Chishtis follow five basic devotional practices (dhikr).^[7]

1. Reciting the names of Allāh loudly, sitting in the prescribed posture at prescribed times (jhikr-i djahr)
2. Reciting the names of Allāh silently (jhikr-i khafī)
3. Regulating the breath (pās-i anfās)
4. Absorption in mystic contemplation (murā-kāba)
5. Forty days of spiritual confinement in a lonely corner or cell for prayer and contemplation (čilla)

Literature

Early Chishti shaykhs adopted concepts and doctrines outlined in two influential Sufi texts: the *‘Awārif al-Ma‘ārif* of Shaykh Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī and the *Kashf al-Mahdūb* of Hudjwīrī. These texts are still read and respected today. Chishti also read collections of the sayings, speeches, poems, and letters of the shaykhs. These collections, called malfūzāt, were prepared by the shaykh's disciples.^[8]

Spiritual lineage

Sufi orders trace their origins ultimately to the Islamic prophet Muhammad, who is believed to have instructed his successor in mystical teachings and practices in addition to the Qur'an or hidden within the Qur'an. Opinions differ as to this successor. Some Sufi orders trace their lineage to Abu Bakr, the first Sunni caliph, others to 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, Muhammad's cousin, whom the Shi'a regard as the first imam. The Chishti, though Sunni, trace their lineage through Ali. This is not unusual for Sufi orders, which tend to stress devotion rather than legalism and sectarianism.

The traditional silsila (spiritual lineage) of the Chishti order is as follows:^[9]

1. 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (Ali, the cousin of Muhammad)
2. Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 728, an early Persian Muslim theologian)
3. 'Abdul Wāḥid Bin Zaid Abul Faḍl (d. 793, an early Sufi saint)
4. Fuḍayl ibn 'Iyāḍ Bin Mas'ūd Bin Bishr al-Tamīmī
5. Ibrāhīm bin Adham (a legendary early Sufi ascetic)
6. Ḥudhayfah al-Mar'ashī
7. Amīnuddīn Abū Ḥubayrah al-Baṣrī
8. Mumshād Dīnwarī
9. Abu Ishaq Shamī (d. 940, founder of the Chishti order proper)
10. Abu Ahmad Chishtī
11. Abu Muhammad Chishtī
12. Abu Yusuf Nasar-ud-Din Chishtī (d. 1067)
13. Qutab-ud-Din Maudood Chishtī (Abu Yusuf's son, d. 1139)
14. Haji Sharif Zindani (d. 1215)
15. Usman Harooni (d. 1220)



Die with the genealogy of the Chishti Order from Muhammad and Ali to Moinuddin Chishti, Louvre Museum

16. Mu'īnuddīn Chishtī (1141-1230)
17. Qutab-ud-Din Bakhtyar Kaki (1173-1235)
18. Farīduddīn Mas'ūd ("Baba Farid", 1173 or 1175 - 1266)

After Farīduddīn Mas'ūd, the Chishti order divided into two branches:

- Chishtī Sabri, who follow Alauddin Sabir Kaliyari.
- Chishtī Nizami who follow Nizāmuddīn Auliya.

History

The Encyclopedia of Islam divides Chishti history into four periods:

- Era of the great shaykhs (circa 597/1200 to 757/1356)
- Era of the provincial khānaqāhs (8th/14th & 9th/15th centuries)
- Rise of the Ṣābirīyya branch (9th/15th century onwards)
- Revival of the Nizāmiyya branch 12th/(18th century onwards)^[10]

The order was founded by Abu Ishaq Shami ("the Syrian") who taught Sufism in the town of Chisht, some 95 miles east of Herat in present-day western Afghanistan.^[11] Before returning to Syria, where he is now buried next to Ibn Arabi at Jabal Qasioun^[12]

Shami initiated, trained and deputized the son of the local emir, Abu Ahmad Abdal.^[13] Under the leadership of Abu Ahmad's descendants, the *Chishtiya* as they are also known, flourished as a regional mystical order.^[14]

The founder of the Chishti Order in South Asia was Moinuddin Chishti. He was born in the province of Silistan in eastern Persia around 536 AH (1141 CE), into a sayyid family claiming descent from Muhammad.^[15] When he was only nine, he memorized the Qur'an, thus becoming a hafiz. His father died when he was a teenager; Moinuddin inherited the family grinding mill and orchard. He sold everything and gave the proceeds to the poor. He traveled to Balkh and Samarkand, where he studied the Qur'an, hadith, and fiqh.^[16] He looked for something beyond scholarship and law and studied under the Chishti shaykh Usman Harooni. He moved to Lahore and then to Ajmer, where he died. His tomb, in Ajmer, is the Dargah Sharif, a popular shrine and pilgrimage site.

Moinuddin was followed by Qutab-ud-Din Bakhtyar Kaki and Farīduddīn Mas'ūd. After Fariduddin, the Chishti Order of South Asia split into two branches. Each branch was named after one of Fariduddin's successors:

1. Nizamuddin Auliya - This branch became the *Chishti Nizami* branch. Nizamuddin Auliya taught Nasiruddin Chiragh Dehlavi who in turn taught Khwaja Bande Nawaz.
2. Alauddin Sabir Kaliyari - This branch became the *Chishti-Sabiri* branch.

Later, yet other traditions branched from the Chisti lineage; in many cases they merged with other popular Sufi orders in South Asia. Founders of such new branches of the lineage include:

1. Ashraf Jahangir Semnani - trained in the Nizami tradition; his followers became the Chishti Nizami Ashrafiya branch.
2. Haji Imdadullah Muhaajir Makki - trained in the Sabari tradition; his followers became the Chishtiya Sabaria Imdadiya branch.



Mughal princess Jahan Ara's tomb (left), Nizamuddin Auliya's tomb (right) and Jama'at Khana Masjid (background), at Nizamuddin Dargah complex, in Nizamuddin West, Delhi

3. Shah Niyaz Ahmad- united the Chishti Nizami order with the Qadriya order to form the Chishtiya Qadriya Nizamia Niyazia branch.

As a result of this merging of the Chishti order with other branches, most Sufi masters now initiate their disciples in all the four major orders of South Asia: Chishti, Suhrawadi, Qadri, and Naqshbandi. They do however, teach devotional practices typical of the order with which they are primarily associated.

The Chishti order has also absorbed influences and merged at times with various antinomian fakir Sufi groups, especially the Qalandar. Some Chishtis both past and present have lived as renunciants or as wandering dervish.^[17]

Mughal rulers

Several rulers of the Mughal dynasty of South Asia were Chisti devotees. The emperor Akbar was perhaps the most fervent of them. It is said to be by the blessing of Sheikh Salim Chishti that Akbar's first surviving child, the future Jahangir, was born. The child was named Salim after the sheikh and was affectionately addressed by Akbar as *Sheikhu Baba*.

Akbar also credited the Chisti sheikhs with his victory at the Siege of Chittorgarh. Akbar had vowed to visit the Chisti dargah, the tomb of Moinuddin Chishti, at Ajmer if he were victorious. He fulfilled his vow by visiting the dargah with his musicians, who played in honor of the sheikh.



The Mughal Emperor Akbar was a great patron of the Chishti Order.

Akbar's descendant, Jahanara Begum Sahib, was also a devout follower of the Chisti Order.

Other notable Chisti shaykhs

- Haji Imdadullah
- Rashid Ahmad Gangohi
- Noor Muhammad Maharvi
- Meher Ali Shah
- Mohammad Abdul Ghafoor Hazarvi
- Khalil Ahmad Saharanpuri
- Husain Ahmad Madani
- Muhammad Ilyas Kandhlawi
- Ashraf Ali Thanwi
- Muhammad Zakariya Kandhlawi
- Qutub ul A'arifeen Sufi Muhammad Iqbal Madni
- Molana Peer Aziz ur Rehman Hazarwi
- Molana Muhammad Ihsan ul Haq (Raiwand, Pakistan)
- Molana Abdul Hafeez Makki
- Sufi Muhammad Sarwar (Jamia Ashrafia, Pakistan)
- Shykh ul Mashaikh Molana Muhammad Abdul Ghaffar (Kabirwala, Pakistan)
- Molana Sufi Muhammad Amjad (Baba) (Peshawar, Pakistan)



The passing of Shah Jahan; attending him, his daughter Princess Jahanara.

Notes

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