

Religious Pluralism and International Sufi Movement : An Analysis of Inayat Khan's (1882-1927) Mystical Thoughts

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Abstract

The article presents an introduction to the evolution of the perennial and ideological encounter between Inayat Khan's (1882-1927) International Sufi Movement and the diversity of religious belief systems. It analyses the teachings and thoughts of Inayat Khan and his mystical message and then, explicates his religious and philosophical thoughts that include unity of religious ideals. Finally the paper concludes with a reflection on the key aspects of Inayat Khan's Sufi order and their policy of Religious Pluralism in view of Islam.

Keywords: belief system, religious diversity, religious pluralism, sufi order, international and Western sufism

INTRODUCTION

Inayat Khan (1882-1927), the Indian mystic was the first to make Sufism widely accessible to Westerners. He left for Europe in 1910 in order to bring a universal spiritual message to the Western world. The Sufi Order International he established in 1920 is an international organization of people following the Mystical Message. It functions as a framework for people searching an embodied spirituality that transcends the varieties of religious beliefs and to show how mysticism can harmonize eastern and western culture.

It is important that Inayat Khan's Sufi teachings as well as his International Spiritual Movements (The Sufi Order and the International Sufi Movement) have attracted considerable scholarly interest in the West. A number of studies have focused on the role of his Mystical thoughts and their place in the development of Western Sufism. It is featured as a new religious

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movement (NRM) in many encyclopedias of religious and Spiritual groups in the West, and has been analyzed in relation to the growing modern thoughts, philosophies, practices and groups. There has also been recognition of the importance of Inayat Khan's spiritual and Indian cultural heritage for the shape, appeal and challenges of this transnational spiritual movement.

His teaching was nearly given during the years 1910- 1926 in the West. It covers a great many subjects. Several of them were grouped in series of lectures and taken up again some years later. Certain subjects may cover nearly the same ground as others. The stories and examples which are abound in most of his works are met again elsewhere. He brought the teachings and practices of Sufism into the lives of thousands of Westerners. He inspired and directed the organization of an international Sufi movement and the inception of Sufi communities in many cities in Western Europe and the United States.

Inayat Khan's teachings gathered in the volumes of "The Sufi Message", originally published as 14 volumes, the last volume is the index, is the collected lectures he delivered in Europe and the personally wrote very little but the core of his Sufi Message written by his own hand is the 'Gayan, Vadan, Nirtan (The Dance of the Soul) which contains of Inayat's spiritual feelings, thinking, speaking and acting. It is published by Motilal Banarsidas Publishers (Pvt) Ltd of New Delhi, India.

The following are the complete series of The Sufi Message contain Inayat Khan's lectures, discourses and other teachings. *The way of Illumination, The Mysticism of Sound and Music, The Art of Personality, Mental Purification and healing, Spiritual Liberty, The Alchemy of Happiness, In An Eastern Rose Garden, Sufi Teachings, The Unity of Religious Ideals, Sufi Mysticism, Philosophy, Psychology and Mysticism, The Divinity of the Human Soul and Sacred Readings: The Gatha's.*

INAYAT KHAN AND SUFISM

Inayat Khan identifies the meaning of the word Sufi as 'wisdom' as well as 'Purity'. He explains that Sufism is neither a religion nor a philosophy. To him unlike religions in general, Sufism excludes the foundation of religions, i.e. principles, distinctions, and differences. In addition, unlike philosophy which advocates the study of nature in its qualities and diversifications, Sufism advocates unity or unification and harmonization. He explains further that Sufism is an essence of all religions but it is presented in Muslim terminology. He says (Inayat Khan, 1990, p.264).

Sufism has never, in any period of history, been a religion or a certain creed. It has always been considered as the essence of every religion and all religions. Thus when it was given to the world of Islam, it was presented by the great Sufis in Muslim terminology. Whenever the Sufi ideal was presented to a certain people, it was presented in such a way as to make it intelligible to those people.

Besides, he elucidates that Sufism is beyond religion as it is the light and sustenance of every soul, also an attempt to transform the mortal being to immortal (Inayat Khan, 1990, p.53).

Sufism is a name applied to a certain philosophy by those who do not accept the philosophy; hence it cannot really be described as a religion; it contains a religion but is not itself a religion. Sufism is a religion if one wishes to learn religion from it. But it is beyond religion, for it is the light, the sustenance of every soul, raising the mortal being to immortality.

Accordingly, he says that any person from any religion can be a Sufi, because the meaning of the Sufi is a person who has the knowledge of both outer and inner life. Sufism has existed in this form at all time in the history of the world without its founder (Inayat Khan, 1990, p.252.). In this way, Inayat Khan offered different views on the meanings of Sufism and Sufi in the history of Muslim Sufism.

Inayat Khan when demonstrating the forms of Sufism, states that the Sufi sees only the one truth in all forms. In other words, Sufi's religion is not separate from the religions and faiths of the world. Hence, the Sufi is ready to offer the prayer as a Christian or a Jewish or a Hindu or a Buddhist or a Muslim. In defense of his view of Sufism with religious ideals, he states (Inayat Khan, 1990, p.20):

The Sufi sees the one truth in all forms. If anyone asks a Sufi to come and offer prayer in the Christian church, he is ready to do so. If someone would like to take him to the synagogue and ask him to pray as the Jews do, he would be quite willing; and among Muslims he will offer Namaz [Prayer] as they do. In the Hindu temple he sees the same God, the living God, in the place of the idol; and the temple of Buddha inspires him instead of blinding him with idolatry. Yet his true mosque will be his heart in which the Beloved lives, who is worshipped by both Muslim and Kufr [disbelief, he means non-Muslims] alike.

In this way, he offered a different view in the history of Sufism which is affirmed by Elias Amidon (Pir of the Sufi Way) who says that Inayat Khan vividly revealed the meaning of Sufism from the exclusive relation with Islamic Shariah, and affiliated it with religious ideals naming it Universal Sufism. According to him, this step made the possibility of tasawwuf of all religions, and attracted the people from different beliefs especially the West towards Inayatian Sufism (2007, p.24-25).

Consequently, Inayat Khan gives the Sufis the capacity to become open to all religious forms, and presents the religious pluralism through his Sufi teachings. He points out that Sufism is like a school in which the students in different levels and forms. Hence, Sufi is not against the man who follows other religious faiths, but tolerates all religions of the world. This fact is indicated in his following sentences (1990, p.53).

The Sufi tolerates all [religions], and considers them all his; therefore he does not belong to a religion but all religions belong to him. He can see all the religions like so many forms in a school: some are in one; others are in higher forms, that is, some study life more deeply. And in each class in the school there are pupils who like to play.

It should be noted here that Inayat Khan comprehended Sufism and *Vedanta* as similar concepts and thoughts when he was young. It is evident in a conversation held between Inayat Khan and a Hindu guru that is mentioned in *Biography of Pir-o-Murshid Inayat Khan* in which the Hindu guru expressed his respect to Sufism and Sufis also of his interest to learn them. Inayat Khan replied: “Call it Sufism or Vedantism; it is the one and only Truth, perhaps given in different forms, but as it all come from one main source, it cannot be different, and it is all the same (1990, p.32)”

Moreover he illustrates that the Sufi orders such as *Naqshibandi* and *Qadiri* come from this comprehensive meaning of Sufism which includes all forms of religious ideals (Inayat Khan, 1990, 18). He states:

From this school of Sufism came four schools: the first was the Naqshibandi which works mostly with symbolism, ritual, and ceremony. The second was the Qadiri, which taught wisdom within the realm of the existing Islamic religion in the East. The third was the Sohrawardi which taught the mystery of life by the knowledge of metaphysics and the practice of self-control. The fourth was the Chishtiyya which represented the spiritual ideal in the realm of poetry and music. From these schools many branches sprang forth

in Arabia, Turkey, Palestine, Tartary, Russian Turkestan, Bokhara, Afghanistan, India, Siberia, and other parts of Asia.

He continues his discussion on Sufism by explaining the four stages of Sufism which are *Shariat* [sic], *Tariqat* [sic], *haqiqat* [sic] and *marifat* [sic]. In other words he affirms that *shariat* is a law to harmonize with one's surroundings and self within. It deals with all aspects of life unlike other religious laws. *Tariqat* is an understanding of the law before following it. *Haqiqat* is knowing and realizing the truth of being and the inner laws of nature which leads to the realizing the one Being, and *marifat* is the actual realization of God and oneness of Being (Inayat Khan, 1990, p.199-200),

According to him, these are the four grades of knowledge in Islam. When these four stages are achieved and accomplished by a Sufi, he reaches the perfection which is the state of God and Perfect One.

INTERNATIONAL SUFI MOVEMENT

The International Sufi Movement is an important part of Inayat Khan's Sufi thought, a part which demonstrates his concept on the forms of Sufism states that the Sufi sees only one truth in all forms. In other words, The International Sufi movement established by him is a vehicle and media to reinstate his universal Sufism elaborates that the aspects of the religions are different but the essential truth is one.

It expanded the territorial, religious and ethnic boundaries of India and Diasporas, proclaiming a universal essence of Sufism independently of the religious ideals and united together in the path of wisdom and brotherhood (1990, p.252.) as he says that:

The Sufi Movement is a movement of members of different nations and races united together in the ideal of wisdom; they believe that wisdom does not belong to any particular religion or race, but to the human race as a whole. It is a divine property which mankind has inherited; and it is in this realization that the Sufis, in spite of belonging to different nationalities, races, beliefs and faiths, still unite and work for humanity in the ideal of wisdom.

Hence, Inayat Khan believes that the Sufi movement tries to avoid the differences between the religions and beliefs, and provides brotherhood and humanity. In this way, the Inayatian Sufi Movement opens the door to all the people whatever the religion or church or sect he/she may belong to.

Inayat Khan formed the first Sufi organization in London which was called the Sufi Order, and began to spread his message and attracted a number of students in London, Holland and also in many other countries. In 1923 Inayat Khan established International Sufi Movement under Swiss law after dissolving the Sufi Order of London. The Headquarters of this movement is set up in The Hague, Holland, in spite of its incorporation into Geneva. Hidayat Inayat Khan (2007) describes the emblem of the movement as follows:

The emblem of the International Sufi Movement is a heart with wings, the heart symbolically representing the great power of love as it reaches upwards, borne upon wings of spiritual liberty into the spheres of Divine Consciousness. In this symbol, the five-pointed star represents the light of the Spirit of Guidance, illuminating the way all along the flight toward inner awakening. The crescent moon represents the receptive and expressive qualities of the heart set free when the limited self is no more the spectator.

The symbol of the movement depicts a winged heart which is also called the *Tughra* (An Arabic and Turkish word which means a calligraphic seal or signature). This winged heart calligraphic symbol was created in honour of Inayath Khan and was gifted to his son Vilayat Inayat Khan on Inayath Khan's 73rd birthday. The Arabic scripts present in the symbol read "*Ya Hazrati Inayat*" (Ya means "O" as an invitation or an invocation. Hazrati means presence that is a respectful title similar to your majesty. Inayat indicates Inayat Khan. The meaning of the phrase is "Oh my highly respectful Inayat Khan"), and "*Qaddasa Allahu Sirrahu*" (A traditional phrase used when the name of a deceased Sufi Saint is mentioned. The word Qaddasa means sanctify, hallow, glorify and venerate. The word Sirr means Secret and mystery or Secret and innermost thought. The phrase means May Allah make his inner thought holy or May Allah sanctify his secret or May Allah make his heart pure) respectively. The *tughra* in the symbol is meant to convey the idea that the desire of the heart is heaven. Moreover the crescent in the heart is to show heart's responsive nature and potential, as crescent, a form of the moon responds to the light of the sun and has the potential to develop into a full moon. The five pointed star supposes the divine light. The heart due to its responsiveness receives the divine light liberated as represented by the wings (Symbol of the Sufi Movement, 2012).

The International Sufi Movement currently consists of more than 100 centers all over the world. According to the list of Inayati Sufi centers issued by Sufi order international (2012) shows that more than eighty percent of the centers are located in the United States in 32 states. Apart from them, there are some

more centers functioning in various places like Australia, Canada, United Kingdom, Denmark, Germany, New Zealand, Norway, Switzerland, Turkey, United Arab Emirates and Pakistan. The extending list offers a proof for Sufi order movements' penetration in particular the west and different places around the globe.

In addition, there is a memorial trust named "The Hazrat Inayat Khan Memorial Trust," located in New Delhi, is founded on the Sufi Message as brought by Inayat Khan. The goal of this Memorial Trust is twofold; to unite the people of all religions and to create a physical opportunity for this to happen. Its main activity is to take care of the *Dargah* (A Persian word used for the memorial tomb or the Sufi Shrine built over the grave of a great and religious figure.) of Inayat Khan and to undertake to render financial, material and spiritual help to the needy and destitute, particularly around the *Dargah*.

Likewise, he has mentioned in his Sufi Message that the purpose of the Sufi Movement is to work towards the unity. Its main object is to bring humanity, divided as it is into so many different sections, closer together in the deeper understanding of life. It is a preparation for a world service, chiefly in three ways. One way is the philosophical understanding of life; another is bringing about brotherhood among different races and creeds; and third way is the meeting of the world's greatest need which is the religion of the day. Its work is to bring to the world that natural religion which has always been the religion of humanity (Inayat Khan, 1990, p.268).

The Sufi Movement is constituted of those who have the same beliefs or Ideals of service to God and to humanity, and who have the ideal of devoting a part or the whole of their life to the service of humanity in the path of truth. This movement has its groups and the members of which belong to all the different religions, for all are welcome, Christians, Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims. No one's faith or belief is questioned; everyone can follow his belief, religion and creed; no one needs to believe in any special creed or dogma. There is freedom of thought. At the same time personal guidance is given on the path, in the problems of both outer and inner life. (1990, p. 271).

As for the activities of the Inayatian Sufi Movement, there are five main activities which include the Universal Worship, the Esoteric School, the Brotherhood and Sisterhood, the Healing Order and Spiritual Symbology.

UNITY OF RELIGIOUS IDEALS AND INAYAT KHAN

Inayat Khan states that all religions are like various forms of water which changes its name to river, sea, lake or stream (Inayat Khan, 1990, p.15). And it is the same with religion, the aspects of the religions are different but the essential truth is one. He justifies the unity of religious ideals in following way:

To say, 'You are different and I am different, your religion is different and my religion is different, your belief is different and my belief is different,' will not unite, it will only divide humanity. Those who, with the excuse of their great faith in their own religion, hurt the feelings of another and divide humanity which has the same source and goal, abuse religion, whatever be their faith. The message, at whatever period it came to the world, did not come just to a certain section of humanity; it did not come to raise only some few people who perhaps accepted the faith, the message, or a particular organized Church. No, all these things came afterwards. The rain does not fall in a certain land only; the sun does not shine only on a particular country. All that comes from God is for all souls. If they are worthy, they deserve it; it is their reward; if they are unworthy, they are the more entitled to it. Verily, blessing is for every soul; for every soul, whatever be his faith or belief, belongs to God (Inayat Khan, 1990, p.18).

He goes on further to explain that the Sufi shows his identity as he is one with all, and all are with him in the name of universal brotherhood. He is ready to accept everyone from Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus and Zoroastrians, and allows everyone from the different religions to join his brotherhood movement which helps him to associate with other faiths. The Sufi, for Inayat Khan, never questions, what is their religion or faith or belief?

Accordingly, Inayat Khan believes that the Sufi follows the neutral way of belief and thought as he explains, this shows that everyone has his own principle for each action or situation. One person may believe in a certain principle, while another may hold quite a contrary opinion. What one person may call good another may call bad. One says a certain path is the right one, while another takes the opposite direction. The Sufi, instead of becoming centered in his likes and dislikes and limiting himself to a certain faith or belief, reasoning out right and wrong, focuses his view on that of another. Thus he sees the reason why he believes and why he does not, why something is right to one and wrong to another. He also understands why that which is called good by some people may be called bad by others, and thus by keeping his point of view under control he arrives at the true height of wisdom (1990, p.256-258).

Furthermore, he argued that God is the Father of the whole people of different faiths, and God is not only the Father of one particular religious sect; people are entitled to be called His children. Following a particular religion is a man-made concept, it is not from God. Hence, for Inayat Khan, the idea of association with people of all faiths is to be developed, and the Sufi is to respect a man's belief and his worship whatever they may be, even if they are quite different from one's own religion and faith (Inayat Khan, 1990, p.17). He presented this unity of religious faiths by means of universal brotherhood and the spirit of tolerance which is, according to him, the essence of all religions and need of the present day.

Based on his idea of elimination of religious intolerance, Inayat Khan presented the following ten principal thoughts (www.sufiorder.org/ten_thoughts) which are considered the basic principles of his Sufi message and teaching.

- i. There is the only Being, He is One God, the Eternal and Absolute One. He is God of All and Ultimate Truth.

For Inayat Khan, A Sufi sees the God as God of All. Although He is named variously by different believers such as Allah, God, Gott, Dieu, Khuda, Brahma, or Bhagawan, the names do not make any difference to them. A Sufi witnesses God in everything that is why people worship God's creations such as the sun, the fire, the idols and many more. What more he observes is God's presence in everything in the universe; God in everything, and everything in God. he believes that God is the one who assists him to attain his eternal goal. Therefore, the Sufi's aim is attainment of the divine being and forgetting the individual self. He sees the perfection in God and looks at Him as the lover to his beloved.

- ii. There is Spirit in all souls and one Guiding Master who leads the followers towards the Divine light.

A Sufi believes, God in spite of being the source of all knowledge, has selected him to pass on his knowledge to the world. God opts out the one who is God in his consciousness, but a man for the world. The matured soul god selected is capable of imparting his knowledge to the ordinary human souls. Although God's message is spoken through all things in the world, it is this God-like Guiding Spirit in human guise, verbalize and materialize his inspiration and guidance to all. All the prophets, saints and spiritual guides of the different creeds are the same person in various guises. A truly guided one recognizes the person under disguise, whereas the misguided one goes astray by only seeing the form or the guise. This Guiding Spirit, although known by different names throughout the history, arrives constantly in order to guide the humanity

(1990, p.14). The Guiding Spirit comes constantly to awaken humanity and to guide man towards divine perfection in different manner, and He may be named with different nouns at different periods of the history. The Sufi recognizes the guiding master as not only the prophet but also the wise.

No matter the master or *murshid* is young or old, literate or illiterate high or low in economic status, a Sufi follows him without inquiry or doubting. Gradually he experiences and visions the light of truth through everything in the universe. The guiding spirit is scarce like Inayat Khan quotes in one of his Sanskrit poems: “Jewels are stones, but cannot be found everywhere; the sandal tree is a tree, but does not grow in every forest; although there are many elephants, only one king elephant, so there are human beings all over the world, but the real human being is rarely to be found.” (1990, p.15).

- iii. There is one Sacred Book, the only Holy manuscript of nature which can enlighten the readers.

The Sufis do not advocate the idea of clinging to one sacred book. They consider the act of sticking to one scripture resulted in separation and disunity in humanity. While acknowledging all kinds of sacred scriptures like Vedanta, Zend-Avesta (The Zoroastrian sacred texts), Bible, Qur'an, nature is more esteemed as the only Holy Book. For the Sufis every element in the nature is a page of Holy book which inspires him all the time. The divine law presents in the manuscript of nature can be read only when the inner eye is open and keen. This is the source of knowledge to all spiritual guides (1990, p.15-16).

- iv. There is only one Religion that leads man towards the attainment of his ideal and fulfils the purpose of every soul.

Inayat Khan states that religion is a path of attainment and it is the duty of every individual to go through it. A Sufi allows everyone to follow his own path without any comparison to other's faith. The religion, in his view, is a way that leads man towards the liberation and self-realization. Also the Sufi enhances the religious values and accepts the unity of religious ideals (1990, p.16).

- v. There is only one Law which is the law of Reciprocity that can be observed with a sense of awakened justice.

Inayat Khan believes that a peaceful life with others cannot be led until the justice is built within him. Also he asserts that the different laws from the different religions may meet in this one truth that is the one

and only Law. Hence, the Sufi enhances its value, and in accepting what another does to him he makes an allowance (1990, p.17).

- vi. There is only one human Brotherhood that unites mankind indiscriminately in the Universal Brotherhood and Fatherhood of God.
Accordingly, the Sufi realizes the oneness of the mankind that is the only purpose of his being on earth, and unites himself with others like a human family which widens the circle of human Brotherhood and avoids the divisions and differences among men (1990, p.18).
- vii. There is only one moral that is love, springs out from self-denial and blooms in deeds of beneficence.
The love, according to him, is the source of all that gives birth to patience, hope, forgiveness, tolerance, and to all moral principles. All deeds of beneficence, generosity, kindness and charity take root in the soil of love of a loving heart. He says that the love is the light of the sight. One can see deeper with the help of love. The cause of the ignorance is the lack of love (1990, p.19).
- viii. There is only one object of praise, the beauty which uplifts the heart of its worshippers through all aspects from the seen and the unseen.
What he means by object is beauty. He explains that the man cultivates the beauty as he prefers it with higher aspect, and worships God as he has recognized God in the beautiful merits. Therefore, the Sufi with his view of beauty observes the source of all beauty in the physical and unseen world. Thus, he worships the beauty as God is beautiful, and sees the face of the beloved in all creations (1990, p.20).
- ix. There is only One Truth, the true knowledge of our being and self, within and without, which is the essence of all wisdom.
Accordingly, the Self Knowledge is the truth that blooms from the knowledge of God. It answers all problems and questions such as what is the purpose of my life? From where have I come? What happens at death? etc., Because of the Self-knowledge people are taught in different languages and in various forms of worship. This is the essence of all religions; the Sufi traces it in every faith and religion. And recognizes the Self Knowledge as the knowledge of wisdom which is eternal and divine. (1990, p.21).
- x. There is only One Path to annihilate the false ego in the real, which leads the mortal to immortality, in which resides all perfection.
The path of annihilation, in his point of view, is the only path for the man

to release himself from the false ego. Hence the Sufi, selects the path of annihilation, and finds at the end of this journey that the destination was he. Because the human soul becomes helpless and deluded in contact with the body and mind. The fancies of the mind and the desires of the body do not suffice for the purpose of the life. Thus, the path of annihilation is the only solution to protect the human life from the tragedy of life. (1990, p.21-22).

UNIVERSAL WORSHIP

The Universal worship or The Church of All is the main religious activity of the International Sufi Movement (1990, p.274). Inayat Khan affirms that this religious activity is a combination of different types of worship of all living faiths. This is presented according to his concept of Universal Sufism. He also believed that every prophet and all great souls beleived, prayed and desired for a universal worship and it was essential, as Inayat Khan puts forward, for everyone to know the wisdom of all religious scriptures and teachings. Therefore he felt there was a huge need of this kind of worship at all times.

As well, Inayat Khan declares that the Universal worship is not meant to propagate or promote a particular religion or dogma. On the contrary it is meant to bring together the followers of different religions (1990, p.282). Through this what this movement expect is strengthening the own faith of its followers without losing their religious identity. For them it is the way of establishing greater confidence and greater trust in the unity of mankind as a whole.

In universal worship, the Sufi Student called *Mureed* follows the individual spiritual practices prescribed by a Spiritual teacher or Guide Called *Murshid*. The practices also can be prescribed by Head of the Sufi Order called the *Pir* time to time. Apart from *Murshid* and *Pir*, some other persons like Representatives and Guides, Coordinators, Retreat Guide and Healing Conductors are in authority to conduct classes and facilitate the spiritual practices or initiations in universal worship.

In addition, the Universal worship service includes many types of practices, to name a few: Prayers, Meditation, *Zikr*² [sic], *Wazifa*³ [sic], *Muraqaba*

² Remembrance of the Sufi text in daily life.

³ Evocation of qualities of the divine.

⁴ [sic], Spiritual dance, *Ryazat* ⁵ [sic], Fasting and *Urs*.⁶ As for the prayers, there is a script written by Inayat Khan himself to be recited in particular occasions like The Healing Prayer, The Confraternity Prayers, Prayer for Peace, Prayer of invocation and Prayer for the New Year.

The spiritual traditions of the religions with readings from their sacred books are honoured by the Church of All service. The different religions and spiritual aspects of these traditions are learned by *Cherags*⁷ as part of their training for ordination.

Karin Jironet⁸ (2002, p.64-65) describes the Universal Worship conducted by the Inayatian Sufi Movement in the following sentences:

The attributes of the Universal worship are very similar in the five rooms system. In the front of the room is an altar [the table or an area where religious worship or sacrifice occurs] with a yellow cloth, on which the Sufi emblem is embroidered. In the guidelines it is said that if possible it is recommended that the altar be placed in the East, when seen from the audience. It is also recommended that the altar be placed on a podium, about three steps above the floor level. On the podium are three chairs placed, assigned to the persons who officiate at the altar. The chairs are facing each other, two on the left and one on the right end of the altar. On the altar six candles of equal height are placed in a half circle. Before each candle one of the Holy Scriptures representing the world religions is placed. The traditions represented are from left to right the Hindu, the Buddhist, the Zoroastrian, the Jewish, the Christian and the Islamic. In the centre of the half circle is a seventh candle representing the Spirit of Guidance. In front of this candles are placed, a stick of incense

⁴ The Sufi meditation.

⁵ The Sufi mindfulness of breath technique.

⁶ The celebration of Inayat Khan's birth and death anniversary with *Zikr*, meditation and the singing of spiritual songs.

⁷ The clergy who helps initiates to move towards enlightenment. *Cherag* means in Persian "Light Bearer"

⁸ The Swedish researcher who wrote her Ph.D dissertation on "The Image of Spiritual Liberty in the Sufi Movement following Hazrat Inayat Khan," and published books on psychology of religion, theology, Sufi Mysticism into the west and leadership development. She has participated universal worship of Inayatian Sufi Movement in five centres in The Netherland.

burning and a Sufi textbook. In the centre, above the altar, hangs an eight candle from which the others are lighted, representing the light of God. Fresh flowers are placed in two vases at the ends of the altar, sometimes also elsewhere in the room. The visitors sit on chairs that are placed in rows, facing the altar.

It starts with the reading of teachings and objects of the Sufi Order and the announcement of the subjects of the classes held at *Kankah*. After that *Murshid* delivers a talk on some subject 15 to 20 minutes. Then, different members read passages from various religious scripts like Qur'an, the Bible, Bhagavad Gita and others followed by a hymn sung by all.

Inayatian Sufi Movement in Islamic point of view

It is important here to look how the Inayatian notion of unity of religious ideals differs conceptually with the principles and basics of Islam. The teachings of Islam are simple and intelligible. The Oneness of Allah (swt), the Prophethood of Muhammad (saw), and the concept of life after death are the basic articles of its faith. They are based on reason and sound logic. All of the teachings and worships of Islam flow from those basic beliefs and are simple and straightforward. Unlike other religions, there is no hierarchy of priests, no far-fetched abstractions, no complicated rites or rituals in Islam.

Additionally, the mystical thought of God presented by Inayat Khan contradicts the concept of *tawhid* in Islam. *Tawhid* stresses on the Oneness of God. And all the forms of existence are diverse manifestations of One God and the same Absolute reality. The Qur'an asserts the absoluteness of God in the following verse:

Say (Oh Prophet): He is God, the One God and the Absolute. He begets not, nor is He begotten; and there is none like Him (Al-qur'an 112:1-3).

A number of Mufasssirin (the commentators of al-Qur'an) such as Qurtubi and Sayyid Qutb have interpreted these verses as a principle of *tawhid* in Islam. According to them, Allah is One without partner in His essence, attributes and actions as He is One without associate in His divinity and in worship. He exists by Himself. Nothing can rival Him as a source of power. There is no one worthy of worship other than Allah. Therefore, the associating partners with Allah in any of the aspects of *tawhid* is in fact associationism or sin of idolatry (Shirk).

Besides, the concept of *tawhid* has been divided into three categories by Muslim scholars based on the Qur'an and the Sunnah as follows;

1. Tawhid al-Rububiyah (Unity of Allah with His Lordship)
2. Tawhid al-Uluhiyyah (Unity of Allah with His Godhood)
3. Tawhid al-Asma Wasifat (Unity of Allah with His Names and Attributes)

This means that Allah is only One Being who enjoys the status of Godhood and divinity powers, no one else can claim or share to God's Lordship, names and attributes. In view of the above Islamic consideration of tawhid, it is clear that the mystical ontology and the notion of God introduced by Inayat Khan have not paid attention to the category of tawhid highlighted above and went astray on this aspect.

Moreover it is relevant to point out here the Islamic view of human soul comparing with the ideas of soul in Inayat Khan's mystical philosophy. The soul, according to Islam, is the true self of the human body as the man consists of a self and a body together. The soul is a higher luminous and inner being differs from the physical body. There are two terms used by al-Qur'an and the Prophetic traditions to describe the human soul. One is Ruh (Spirit), while the other term is *nafs* (Self). As explained in the following Qur'anic verse and the hadith, When Allah creates the human He infuses them with His spirit (Ruh), also a baby in a mother's womb becomes a complete individual when Allah breathes His Ruh into the baby. Allah says:

When I have fashioned him (in due proportion) and breathed into him of My Spirit, fall ye down in obeisance unto him (Al-qur'an 38:72).

Abdullah Ibn Mas'ud reported that the Messenger of Allah said:

Indeed the creation of each one of you is brought together in his mother's belly for forty days in the form of a seed, then he is a clot of blood for a similar period, then a morsel of flesh for a similar period. An angel is then sent to him who blows the breath of life into him....

In addition, Islam asserts that the soul when leaves the body at the time of death, there is no soul can ever come back to this world in the form of rebirth before the Day of Judgment. The new world of interspaces named Barzakh begins when the person's soul leaves his body and his short life on this earth comes to an end. The Qur'an describes the passing away of souls in the following verse:

Allah takes away the souls of human beings at the time of their death; and during their sleep of those also that are not yet dead. And then He retains those against which He has decreed death, and sends back the others till an appointed term. In that surely are Signs for a people who reflect (Al-qur'an 39:42).

In this verse, it is stated that Allah takes the souls at death and during sleep, and separates the body from the soul. The following hadith also affirms that the human soul separates from the body; Abu Hurayrah reported that the Messenger of Allah said:

When the soul of the believer comes out [of its body], two angels receive it and rise with it towards the heavens, whereupon the inhabitants of the heavens say, 'A good soul has come from the earth. Allah has blessed you and the body which you used to occupy.

Based on the above Qur'anic verse and hadith, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah (691-751 AH) vividly expressed the nature of Ruh and its journey after death in his Kitab al-Ruh (Book of the soul), he says:

It is created, but everlasting. It departs temporarily from the body in sleep; when the body dies it departs for the first judgment, returns to the body for the questioning of Munkar and Nakir, and except in the cases of prophets and martyrs, remains in the grave foretasting bliss or punishment until the Resurrection.

Moreover, Islam explains that nafs (Self) plays a role as a mediator between the Spirit and the body. The Spirit from God who is One and Unique, the other is from the material world which is characterized by dispersion and multiplicity. Also the Self (nafs) is considered in Islamic view as one of the places where God discloses Himself to man. The Qur'an says:

Soon We will show them our Signs on the horizons, and within their own selves, until it becomes manifest to them that this is the Truth (Al-Qur'an 41:53)

This Qur'anic verse indicates that the purified human soul will witness the signs of God and see the outward universe for what it truly is a creation of God. So that it can witness spiritual realities through the soul (nafs).

From the above explanation, it is obvious that Islam denies Inayatian argument of divinity of human soul. It rejects his ontological notion of soul which elaborates that the divinity is human nature in God and the expansion

of the human soul, Also it is clear that Inayatian mystical view of Akhlaqi Allah which demonstrates the divine manner and God reflection in human soul took a different direction with Islam. That is to say, for it, the Spirit is not God, but it is from God, and the belief of divine entrance in human soul is totally unacceptable since Islam denies any possibility of God incarnation in human soul.

Furthermore, it seems that the attempt Inayat Khan made to interpret mystical feelings of union with the Divine Being into the language of logic and philosophy gave it the form of pantheism. Losing oneself, according to Inayat Khan, means living in God; it is being clothed with His attributes without losing the essence of one's own personality like the merging of the river in the ocean.

Besides, it is important to notice that there is a similarity between the Inayatian notions of sufism and fana' and the concepts of Nirvana, Atonement and Henosis in terms of a self-nullification and mystical experience, leading to a non-dualistic position of consciousness in which the consciousness of the experiencing mystic becomes one with the experienced object, in other word, the mystic becomes one with his Beloved and merges in the Infinite.

In addition, the concepts of sufism and fana' explained by the early Sufis like al-Sarrāj (d. 378 AH), al-Qushayri (d.465 AH) and al-Hujwiri (d.1077) took a different direction with Inayat Khan's notions of sufism and fana' where most of them agreed that sufism and fana' are realization of God and complete annihilation of the self. They state that it is achievable through a series of subjective experiences (ahwal) and stages (maqamat). According to them, the process of fana' develops until the complete annihilation of self takes place and the sufi becomes the perfect man. In this stage, the Sufi loses himself in the love of Allah (swt) and purifies himself entirely of the earthly desires, it is called that the Sufi has passed away from his being and existence to live in Allah (swt) and annihilated his individual and own will.

CONCLUSION

The Indian Sufi master Inayat Khan was considered the person who introduced the universal Sufism in the West. Of all the mystical concepts that he expressed, interest in Oneness of Being, unity of religious ideals, divinity of human soul and manifestation of God were the most prominent. These notions were central to his Sufi message and teaching.

Inayatian Sufism, as a spiritual and moral way of life, and as a current of thought with universalistic outlook, found an exceptionally congenial ground

for its growth and spread in West in particular and the world in general. His life was a dialogue between Western and Eastern traditions that he sought to understand and to experience. He tried to describe his mystical and ontological experiences using Western language, as well as by using Indian ideas that he interpreted.

He stressed the unity of religious ideals with his Universal and Perennial Sufi message as a response to the problems of civilization that he discovered in the West. And presented the concept of divinity of human soul which describes that each human being can arrive at self-realization or annihilation of the ego. Thereby he went beyond the Sufi tradition of the Chishti order and Indian philosophy of Atma (soul) in which he was educated and trained. In fulfilling his mission he established an organization, the Sufi order international, as a vehicle and framework for people searching an embodied spirituality that transcends the varieties of religious beliefs. It presents itself as universal and open to all regardless of national, religious or ethnic background. And has more than 100 offshoots throughout the world and thousands of followers not only in USA but also among Euro westerners, South and South-east Asians and others.

In addition, Western Sufism presented by Inayat Khan is closely linked to the Theosophical Society which was founded in New York in 1875 by Helen Blavatsky and Henry Steel Olcott. The central doctrine of Theosophy is the Philosophia Perennis that articulates the belief that all religions are expressions of a fundamental universal spiritual or Gnostic wisdom and universal brotherhood of humanity.

To sum up, Religious pluralism is one of the key aspects conveyed by Inayat Khan in order to respect the unity and diversity of the world's religions. It is the view that all religions are equally valid as paths to God. Inayat Khan believes that all religions are in one form although they are many and different from each other emphasizing that all religious paths are finally leading to the same sacred ground. Hence, he urged the elimination of religious intolerance, and taught that Sufi must associate with people of all faiths and religions. He obviously maintained here the same position held by Kabir (1440-1518), Prince Dara Shikoh (1615-1659), Bahai faith and others. However, Inayath Khan's mystical thoughts and teachings are completely against Islamic principles. His call for Unity of Religious ideals aims at eliminating everything which distinguishes Islam from other religions.

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