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Title: **SUFIS AND WOMEN IN MEDIEVAL NORTH INDIA**

ABSTRACT

Women`s relation with Sufis and Sufism has been very close through the ages. In many cases she has been a source of inspiration for Sufis and a medium to attain a status in Divine love. Women continued to play an important part through the ascribed role of being the mother of leading Sufis like Abdul Qadir Jilani, Baba Farid Ganj Shakar and Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya as also in the earned status of being Sufis themselves. The very fact that the first true saint of Islam was a woman, Rabi`a Adawiyya, certainly helped to shape the image of ideal pious woman. However, for certain reasons their role in Sufism has been less visible as in other fields.

The generality of Sufis had an indifferent attitude towards family life and that the disregard of wives was a common feature among the great mystics. Hujwiri expresses high regard for celibacy. However, few Sufis like Syed Gesudraz and Sufis of Suhrawardiyya order showed normal concern for their families.

Not much literature has been produced on this subject and *Malfuzat* literature too does not have enough material which may indicate Sufis` attitude towards women.

A comprehensive description of ideal woman is available only in the writings of the two Sufi poets of Medieval India, namely Amir Khusrau and Malik Muhammad Jaisi. Both have almost identical views on what women should do and what should not do. Both have shown utmost concern for their chastity and have emphasized the need of devotion to their husbands. In a male oriented society they have rightly given advice to women for adhering to certain norms in order to ensure their safety and security. At the same time, they would like them to have total awareness of their rights and duties.

The highly exaggerated emphasis by these two Sufi poets on *pardah* and seclusion for women is to be seen in the background of the prevailing social condition of the age in which they lived. In my view they would have adopted a lenient view on the issue of *pardah* if they were born and lived in this modern age of ours.

We find strong similarity between Khusrau and Jaisi in their perception of women. Both have stressed women's chastity and fidelity which, in their views, is guarded by certain social customs and beliefs like *sati*. Both have idealized the custom of *sati* as it, in their views, helped in preserving the women's fidelity and chastity even after the death.

The major component of Jaisi's writings is characterized by symbolism in which he adopted the form of temporal representation for expressing his mystical ideas. However, his views are not free from paradoxes. On one hand he does not think a woman's advices to her husband worthy of being accepted and on the other he gives her status of an *avtar* and *guru*.