

Afterword

Uṣūlī Shi'ism exercised an extremely strong influence over the theory and practice of the Sufis of the Ni'matullāhī order. The first generation of this revival movement, whose champion was the Indian master, Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh, had not been at all influenced by the Uṣūlī system of theology and its doctrine of *taqlīd*. They identified themselves as followers of the Shi'ite Imāms but abstained from following (*taqlīd*) any Shi'ite clerics. However, the harsh persecution of the Sufis made it inevitable for the Ni'matullāhīs to put more emphasis on the 'political correctness' of their theological beliefs, and consequently their doctrines grew closer to the mystical philosophy of Shi'ite seminary scholars. It would seem that the initiation of some Shi'ite clerics into Sufism and prevention of further persecution were the two main factors leading to this deep infiltration of Shi'ite theology into Ni'matullāhī Sufi thought.

The theory of *wilāya* in traditional Sufism, in which the Sufi master was understood to be a living saint or *walī*, differed substantially from the concept of *wilāya* in Shi'ite theology, in which *wilāya* remained the sole prerogative of the Imāms. Accordingly, Ni'matullāhī masters of this era sought to amalgamate Shi'ite theology with Sufi beliefs about the theory of *Wilāya*. Shāh Ni'matullāh and his successors were known to be the propagators of Ibn 'Arabī's mystical philosophy in Persia. Although Ibn 'Arabī had elaborated a complex theory of Sufi *wilāya*, since the Ni'matullāhī masters after Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh were not able to refer directly to writings of Shāh Ni'matullāh on *wilāya* — which in turn were based on the Sufi teachings of Ibn 'Arabī — they relied heavily on the Shi'ite mystic philosophers from the school of Isfāhan, whose doctrines were taught in Shi'ite seminary schools. This direct influence from Shi'ite seminary scholars sparked a rivalry between Shi'ite clerics and Sufi masters. Sufi masters came to be viewed as representatives of the Imām for spiritual guidance at the time when there was no access to a living Imām.

Ibn 'Arabī's philosophy of Sainthood (*wilāyat*) was the foundation for the corresponding philosophy within Shi'ite-Sufi culture. Ibn 'Arabī sometimes used the term 'general prophethood' (*nubuwwa 'āmma*) for sainthood

(*wilāyat*) after the Prophet Muḥammad, which implies the continuation of divine guidance through sainthood.¹ Hence Sufi saints were considered the only religious guides worthy of the titles of true scholars (*ulamā*) and true heirs of the Prophet.²

Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī, one of the early Shi'ite mystics, largely adopted the philosophy of Ibn 'Arabī. He contended that Sufism and Shi'ism were one reality and not separated. However, Āmulī criticised Ibn 'Arabī for not recognising the first Shi'ite Imām, 'Alī, as the seal of sainthood (*khātam al-wilāya*). He always asserted that the Shi'ite Imāms were the superior recipients of divine inspiration through sainthood and Sufis received their divine guidance through the Shi'ite Imāms.

The Ni'matullāhī masters basically adopted the same theory and philosophy as Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī. Nūr 'Alī Shāh presented the Imām 'Alī as 'the seal of the Imamate' (*khatm-i imāmat*),³ which shows a direct influence from the Akbarian Shi'ite philosopher, Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī. Sainthood (*wilāyat*) was represented as the charismatic authority of Sufi masters derived through Shi'ite Imāms.⁴ This presented a great challenge to the Uṣūlī system of thought, since these mystics appealed to a different religious authority during occultation from Uṣūlī scholars. As Scharbrodt observes, the Ni'matullāhī masters created an amalgamation of the Shi'ite and Sufi philosophy of sainthood (*wilāyat*) by claiming that their spiritual leaders (*qutb*) were both possessors of sainthood and true representatives of the Shi'ite Imāms.⁵ The charismatic authority of the Ni'matullāhī masters and their claims to sainthood gave them such a venerable status that Shi'ite scholars criticised them for competing with the charisma of the Shi'ite Imāms.⁶ The relationship with the twelfth Imam can be seen as a product of the Uṣūlī school of thought: the Shi'ite seminary scholars claimed to exercise the general deputyship (*nīyābat-i āmma*) of the Imām, while in contrast the Ni'matullāhī masters claimed spiritual contact with the twelfth Imām, which was in theological opposition to Uṣūlī claims.⁷ These Ni'matullāhī masters, Nūr 'Alī Shāh, Muẓaffar 'Alī Shāh, Ḥusayn 'Alī Shāh, Majdhūb 'Alī Shāh and Mast 'Alī Shāh, thus all played crucial roles in the assimilation of the Shi'ite doctrine of *wilāya* into Ni'matullāhī Sufism.

Today, history has repeated itself. Historically, the current harsh persecution of Sufis in Iran can be seen as stemming from this animosity between fundamentalist Shi'ite scholars and the Ni'matullāhī order, which is rooted in centuries of conflict between them. Further research into the roots of these theological and philosophical conflicts should greatly help future generations to mitigate these quarrels and misunderstandings between Shi'ite clerics and Sufi masters.⁸