

Travelogue on India, Pakistan, Egypt

Just arriving in the country after a brief visit to Hong Kong. I got off to Dacca bright and early all bound with red tape and arrived to find that my host friend had left Dacca for Chittagong. I was left a message which led me to this hotel. Hardly had I signed the blotter when I found myself talking to a UC student from Berkeley who knew the first references I gave him and also knew Muin Khan who had invited me here in the first place.

I completed a letter to Vilayat (son of my first teacher in Sufism, Pir-o-Murshid Hazrat Inayat Khan) and then one of the many adventures that have crowded in on me too thick and fast to get a fraction of them in my diary, occurred. Through the chance meeting in the hotel lobby I met one after another the family of my friend Muin Khan. This included Sufia Kamal who is the leading poetess of East Pakistan. Each of the family greeted and treated me. We finally came to the home of Pir Maulana Abdul of the Chisti School.

I was no sooner introduced than a man present said he had been translating Sufi Inayat Khan's writings into Bengali, had all his music and many of his pictures and had been corresponding with Sadia in Holland; and wanted to know more of the Mysticism of Sound.

I asked the Maulana a very deep question and he came up with appropriate deep answers. He gave me my new Ryazat, or spiritual practice, and predicted my future for a limited period. I shall not go into details, but I must say that despite the deprecations of a number of teachers in the U.S. he more than confirmed what Murshid said to me in 1923 and 1926. Everything I have felt or thought or said has been confirmed, and this by an illuminated soul. It was foretold that I would get guidance but now it comes with such suddenness and swiftness, I no longer have any choice; it is the same as foretold at birth: either unlimited success or ignominy, no middle path here. I cannot turn back. The work that God has given me, Inshallah, will be fulfilled.

The last night in Dacca quite stands out. I was feted and had the most loving embrace from a large number of men, many officials, and intellectuals, but all loving. I was advised to visit the tomb of Pir Maulana's father, who is popularly known as The Murshid. Pir Maulana's is the most perfect **Ordinary** man I have ever heard about.... Through him I met leader after leader here. When you meet real saints, real Khawwalis, real sages, and real Sufis and feel that marvelous spirit you can ask for no more. But neither can you surrender to less.

I was strongly challenged at times but reached this agreement: either Islam or universal religion. Either Islam proves its superiority or it must join with the other religions as one of several ways. It will not bow down to other religions but it must either take its place alongside of them or prove its

prowess. It does not prove its prowess by argument and force, still less by rage and anger.

The head of the East Pakistan army and his aide, Captain Sadiq took me to the airport and I found also fellow Sufis on the plane. I came directly to Mr. Haddar's house. After a short supper we went to Murshid's shrine and I started to chant Zikr, but it was soon that the Murshid was using my body to chant through. He then told me that I need not wait to go to Ajmir. He confirmed the "flute music" which plays through me and said that I was to use this gift immediately. Also, he gave me the blessing of the crescent and star at the top of my forehead above where Murshid Inayat Khan had made his sign, and said he would guide my footsteps in India.

Now I have been nominated as a candidate for the Waliyat. My directions with regard to the disciples of Pir-o-Murshid Inayat Khan are simple: I am to be the Shams-i-Tabriz and Vilayat the Maulana Roud.

This whole trip has been stupendous but the Pir Maulana said it will be more so. There is much to be done both here and upon my return, but must take one thing at a time. Pir Maulana says, "This breath is the one that counts," At the same time there is an all abiding, all-pervading Divine Breath.

I arrived in Hyderabad and failed to make contact with my host. Whenever this happens I seek adventure and generally find it. My interest in agricultural techniques and diseases and pest problems led me to several places ... and ultimately to the City Park which has fine Islamic style gates, the best garden gates I have seen outside of Japan, or maybe even including that land. They are doing here what I have been belly-aching all over India about ... the trees are pruned, and well pruned; the leaves are taken off and put in composts and they have large compost piles. The wood is divided into twigs and fagots, and heavy wood, which is then used for fuel. No wastage. I met the Park Superintendent and complimented him highly on his work here. The Mogul Gardens with its roses and column Cypress, the Kenya grass, the Nursery ... are just a few of the outstanding things here.

By this time I had located my host and had to go see him. And what do I discover? Fayyus-ud-din is the actual esoteric head of the branch of Sufis (Chisti) into which I was originally initiated. He is a close personal friend of Nehru, yet possessing the good will of Pakistanis. He says he has 10,000 followers in this district alone and gave me the connection between himself, his father, Hasan Nizami, and my own teacher Sufi Inayat Khan. He is also a close friend of the Superintendent of Parks here with whom I have been spending much time, and it seems that the combination of my love for plant life and spiritual development has produced a marvelous harmony.

My coming to Ajmir was nothing but a series of miracles. Before I had put my baggage down my room was invaded by Chisti's. How they found out about me I don't know. I was with them constantly and am now officially Ahmed Murad Chisti. The impetus to study untouched Indian music reached its height here. I have heard nothing like the Sufi Khawwalis. You can take your Marion Anderson and your Chalisain, or anybody, they do not come anywhere near. These men sing to God and are far superior to Negroes or Russians, my erstwhile favorites.

Ajmir is a city of tombs and places of saints; the most celebrated being the Dargah of Khwajah Sahib Moineddin Chisti. I saw many of these shrines, and was taken up on a holy mountain ... not an advertised Abu but one in which you have to get "Masonic permission" to visit.

Twice I visited the shrine of Pir Wali Bahtiari, the successor to Moineddin Chisti. The first mediation I heard all around me "What do you want? What do you want?" Upon recovering from being somewhat unnerved by this I answered, "Divine Guidance." "Go, you have it." The next time at the shrine I received a supernal instruction in the love and compassion side of Islam with a stern warning for the Pakistanis who are 90% politics, 10% religion and that religion in turn is 90% smoke screen.

There are a number of ceremonies which take place around the Dargah. One has to kiss the steps, the cloth, the railing, etc. Here I was given a strange blessing in vision, with two types of tassels put around me, and later a robe and shirt with the instruction that I was henceforth to represent Christian Sufism in all non-Islamic lands. This was confirmed by Syed Farook, my Hadim guide, before I could report it verbally (another confidence).

This visit, which was to have been the supreme goal of my trip, justified itself and I left Ajmir feeling wonderful ... excepting for too much food. Each group there seemed intent on showing that they could give me a bigger feast than the next. There was a newspaper famine going on at the time, but in addition to the feasts, I saw what I had seen in pre-vision great iron pots wherewith to feed the poor. There are many beggars around, too many in fact, but no starvation and there has been little starvation in India, only malnutrition.

After all the feasting given me in Ajmir I became ill from dysentery upon leaving (the only time that I was ill on the whole journey). I arrived in New Delhi, got the same rooms as previously and was about to collapse being quite weak. Pir-o-Murshid Inayat Khan appeared and said I should go to the Egyptian Embassy. So I went; there was virtually no one there, but there was one gentleman. "What do you want?" he said. Out of me came, "I am interested in Moineddin Ibnu' l-Arabi and Islamic Art before the Turkish conquest." His jaws dropped. "How did you find me?" "I am the world's greatest authority on those two subjects. This is the first time that I have ever left Egypt and have just arrived here, and you found me." I told him how and we became excellent friends. It was Dr. Mohammed Kemal Hussein. I came back from the embassy healed. On my visit to Egypt we renewed this friendship and he was quite helpful in many ways.

On my return to Lahore I was challenged by a German "expert" on Oriental philosophy, a graduate of Heidelberg, Leiden, Cambridge, and Columbia. He thought that I was a great humorist or crazy because I told him I had been speaking in the Northwest and was asked to return. The next day I learned that the staff of the hotel thought he was crazy, and I have become a kind of hero. The attitude towards "experts" of this kind here is quite different from that in the United States.

Following this incident, a tonga-wallah took me to a wrong shop and there I learned that the brother of the owner was in Brooklyn seeking to start a Sufi order. Returning later a merchant hailed me

and explained that I could not buy anything more as God had put a limit on my purchases. I told him my name was “Murad” meaning I was under grace and therefore different from a “Mureed” who was under the guidance of a spiritual teacher. A man standing nearby overheard me and identified himself as a mureed. As a result of that “chance” meeting I have been to the assemblage of Naqshibandis, witnessed their ceremonials, took part in their Zikr and was given a cap and beads. We also had a long conversation as several of them spoke good English, and at least two had been to the U.S.

The Khalif in charge was very handsome with beautiful eyes showing love and spiritual light. After the experience of the meeting I told one of the mureeds that I had never seen a man more like Jesus Christ than their Khalif. “You should meet our Murshid,” was there reply. As he leaves near Rawalpindi I hope to meet him. I had to bless them all and embraced nearly all the older men (an experience which left me “high” for two days afterwards.) Everybody was happy and they chanted loudly and joyfully “Allahu” as I was leaving. There is a great possibility that I shall become a recognized saint ... a joke to the western world and a very serious matter here.

My experience in tombs, shrines and meditative places has been overwhelming. Saints build up atmospheres and “ignorant” people have enough knowledge to know that they can benefit by breathing in these places. There is a possibility that someday I shall write on “real saints, real sages, real shrines.” I stand between those who deny their hopeless existence and those who clothe them with awe, imagination, fantasy and hyperboles. These prove nothing.

In Calcutta for two days chiefly in the company of Mrs. Hyder and Duplay, disciples of Maulana Ghafoor. In addition to twice visiting the shrine of Pir Maulana’s father, already mentioned we went also to the tomb of a Syed saint and I felt the atmosphere very strongly. I then sought some healing power to help my friends.

Nasari had given me an introduction to Husein Nizami which I had showed to many people and had somewhere misplaced. So arriving in Delhi I hailed a taxi to take me to Husein, the exoteric Sufi leader, only to discover this. By “chance” however the taxi stopped right in front of Pir-o-Murshid Inayat Khan’s tomb. Went in and cried copiously.

There I met Husein and had a long talk about Sufi publications in English and an international Sufi alliance. Together we visited the tomb Nizam-ud-din Auliya and Princess Jayonara. Once again one was greatly impressed and chanted Zikr.

Several days later Husein and I visited the tomb of Humayun which impressed me very much. Next we circumambulated the grave of Dara Shikoh with “Ya Allah” 7 times and then repeated “Allahu” 21 times. Afterwards we visited the ruins of the khankah of Nizam-ud-din Auliya. I wish to meditate where he did, to spread out a carpet and also give spiritual help to humanity therefrom. This should be possible on my next visit.

That evening at dinner I was introduced as an American Sufi. “What does Sufism mean?”

someone asked. "God alone exists." "That is the same as Vedanta." "Yes."

In Bombay. Much more is happening than I could ever hope to record. For example, yesterday I went out for a walk very early in the day and ran into a real Swami. In the evening there was a stranger in the hotel lobby who I had an impulse to speak with. I had just written some poetry which I had hoped to present to the Nizam of Hyderabad. Impulsively I pushed it in front of the stranger in the lobby. He proved to be a Chisti-Sufi. One finds again and again that the unconscious, when God-guided, is more successful than anything.

It is almost impossible to guess the age of the Dervish, for the radiance grows as he gives more scope to the divinity within him. The Sifat-i-Allah are neither imaginations nor symbols; they are realities, and whatever characteristic man endows God with the same begins to manifest in him, and more and more and more.

Once when I was living in Abbottabad in Pakistan I was teaching the boys there fundamentals of baseball. The boys, most of whom knew cricket, never stood far away from the batter. Nobody would play in the outfield. A Dervish appeared. He was not content to play in the outfield either, but he played the whole outfield at once: As soon as the ball was hit, and sometimes even before he was off like a deer; he acted even more like a deer than a youth. And after the game he would disappear, but as soon as the group appeared on the playing field again he would always show up.

My birthday coincided with that of Husein, the grandson of Prophet Mohammed who is said to have obtained the divine wisdom and to have died a martyr. Although the people here (Cairo) are not Shias, the day was a holy holiday and the night time was the climax of a festival which began several days ago and may continue on.

The same is true with the Arabs as with all other Asian peoples I have met; it is very easy to communicate with them on any level, including the highest. It is very difficult to delineate between Islam and Sufism until you get deeper into what is called tarik. And the first nonsense that has to be cleared away is that there are not many Sufis nor persons interested in Sufism, and that there are a lot of fanatics and superstitious humbugs who are lazy or worse.

The Khan-i-Khalili is a bazaar district near Al-Azhar. It is full of narrow streets and lanes and has many small mosques and still more khankahs where Sufis meet. One needs a guide unless one has a compass. It is something like a mixture of Chinese New Years and a summer fair at the same time. Tremendous crowds surge down alleys, lanes and what not; in addition there were boys who used sort of a football formation to surge forward, disregarding others. There were many women in the more open places but the narrow spots had only men (or the women connected with the stalls). There are women dervishes who meet separately, but so far as I have found only the Chistis have the men and women do Zikrs together. I saw only two veils, however, and when there were women they mingled with others without any noticeable distinctions being made.

It took us quite awhile to find the Shadhili khankah to which my friend belonged. Each group meets

separately in the same building. My friend's Sheikh is no more, but two or three Khalifs led tea ceremonies. There were readings of Qur'an and chanting, then the Zikrs in which I could join singing the name of Allah. The first thing noticeable is that these groups form functions similar to antiphonal and choir singing in the Christian churches, but to me with a rather purer sound.

Later on there were melodious songs, beautiful arias and not just chants, in which the others not singing including the younger men repeated a phrase of Zikr in rhythm-background. Then we held hands and performed Zikr standing close together and later on in sort of a jump movement. Some swung their heads. This went on for some time and was heightened in speed and loudness until the depths of one's being was touched.

Then they varied the Zikr phrasing, which I have noticed all Sufi schools do somewhat, passing from the intelligible to the semi-intelligible or non-intelligible intellectually. Thus the name Allah can merge into Eleh which may be easier to sing and feel.

Around ten o'clock we went to the Syed Hussain Mosque where three groups of Dervishes were holding forth, but the place was impossibly crowded. Then we visited some khankahs. Most of these were "wild" but the largest one seemed to be made of intellectuals who were quite sober. The Rifa'is were more ecstatic than the Shadhilis. And there were some who were very wild. There were many groups we did not see including the Naqshibandis.

The first and most obvious impression is that there are many thousands of Sufis here.

All the shoeshine boys in Cairo have dropped their prices and are fighting to shine my shoes because they say I have Baraka. This supposition has spread even beyond the shoeshine boys as for example to a guide who was impressed by my visit to Syedna Zeinab where a grandfather of the prophet has her tomb. This visit occurred on Jan. 5th, 1961. Four days later I met Sheikh Abu Salem Amira of the Rifai's. The first question he asked me was, "Have you just visited Syedna Zeinab?" All our European Orientalists say there is no telepathy; if they were to see my diaries they'd probably say I was the biggest liar who ever lived. The Sheikh gave lessons which were mostly moral and spiritual but not the humbug words "moral" and "spiritual" which lecturers are so fond of.

I have been patronizing the "Garden of Allah" in the Khan-i-Khalil bazaar for purchases. I was introduced to a shoemaker downstairs who fitted me out. Somehow or other the story got around that I am a dervish. Yesterday, Jan. 17, '61, when I was in this shop the shoemaker came up breathlessly. He took me by the hand and led me downstairs. This was surprising as my shoes were not to be fitted until the next week. Sitting down there was an old blind man, a Sheikh. We sat silently and I gave him my beads. "Naqshibandi." He gleamed all over ... he is the Naqshibandi teacher here. We embraced and then one experiences Baraka, not just blessing, but the warm fire of love and magnetism and joy penetrating all through one's personality. It was a tender moment. There are things beyond words and language.

One night I entered the Sidi Shirani Shrine on the occasion of the saint's birthday celebration. There were thousands of people present. As soon I took off my shoes and crossed the threshold two sets of strong arms seized me. "Well, I thought, Lewises have tread in where fools fail to go one time too many; they've finally got you, you have dared so many times to enter holy places without permission." Instead I was immediately conducted to the microphone and found myself guest speaker of the evening. One does not know how these things occur.

They celebrate saint's day here in Egypt even more than in India and Pakistan. It is partly an inheritance from Christianity, partly from older religions, and no doubt came to fruition in the Fatimide Period when Shia Islam was in control. They have Moulads which means festivals, like the Mardi Gras and everything is included. Last night I attended a circus. This is largely in the form of side shows but one side show proved to include the main events, beginning with lion-taming and having a combination of vaudeville and animal show. I saw the native dancing, perhaps as good or better than the casinos and much less coarse. I had to buy the candy which is supposed to contain the Baraka. Later I may go to Tanta, inshallah, where the Bedawi dervishes hold forth, whose candy is particularly sacred. Evidently just as monks make wines or liquors, dervishes here make or cause candy to be made. It is quite different from most forms in the U.S. they have some like peanut brittles and New Orleans types.

On arriving in Alexandria I went to the travel bureau. It was raining torrents and as it turned out I had another reason as well for staying in the offices all afternoon. I had just begun speaking with the woman in charge who was easily one of the most beautiful women I have ever met when the manager came down. "Oh, there you are; I have been waiting for you." Shades of Paul Brunton. He had eyes exactly like those which appear in the last part of "A Search in Secret Egypt." He was a sage and a seer and yet performing a public function. Even his own underlings did not know this until the foreign visitor arrived and it was important to speak openly. He proved to be both telepathic and clairvoyant. He could read my mind like a book, and regaled me with statements and questions. Like myself he is a dervish, and that as yet means nothing in the U.S. He read many secret experiences I have had in holy places and which, in a certain way, affect my international peregrinations. When I told him he was the image of the adept Brunton mentions, he said that all adepts here are Sufis.