Impact of Sufism on Indian Cinema: A New Cultural Construct for Mediating Conflict

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Abstract : Without going much into the detail of long history of Sufism in the world and the etymological definition of the word 'Sufi', it will be sufficient to underline that the concept of Sufism was to focus the mystic power on the spiritual dimension of Islam with a view-shielding the believers from the outwardly and unrealistic dogma of the faith. Sufis adopted rather a liberal view in propagating the religious order of Islam suitable to the cultural and social environment of the land. It is, in fact, a mission of higher religious order of any faith, which disdains strife and conflict in any form. The joy of self-realization being the essence of religion is experienced after a long spiritual practice. India had Sufi and Bhakti (devotion) traditions in Islam and Hinduism, respectively. Both Sufism and Bhakti traditions were based on respect for different religions. The poorer and lower caste Hindus and Muslims were greatly influenced by these traditions. Unlike Ulemas and Brahmans, the Sufi and Bhakti saints were highly tolerant and open to the truth in other faiths. They never adopted sectarian attitudes and were never involved in power struggles. They kept away from power structures. Sufism is integrated with the Indian cinema since its initial days. In the earliest Bollywood movies, Sufism was represented in the form of qawwali which made its way from dargahs (shrines). Mixing it with pop influences, Hindi movies began using Sufi music in a big way only in the current decade. However, of late, songs with Sufi influences have become de rigueur in almost every film being released these days, irrespective of the genre, whether it is a romantic Gangster or a cerebral Corporate. 'Sufi is in the DNA of the Indian sub-continent', according to several contemporary filmmakers, critics, and spectators.The inherent theatricality motivates the performer of the 'Sufi' rituals for a dramatic behavior. The theatrical force of these stages of Sufi practice is so powerful that even the spectator cannot resist himself from being moved. In a multi-cultural country like India, the mediating streams have acquired a multi-layered importance in recent history. The second half of Indian post-colonial era has witnessed a regular chain of some conflicting religio-political waves arising from various sectarian camps in the country, which have compelled the counter forces to activate for keeping the spirit of composite cultural ethos alive. The study has revealed that the Sufi practice methodology is also being adapted for inclusion of spirituality in life at par to Yoga practice. This paper, a part of research study, is an attempt to establish that the Sufism in Indian cinema is one such mediating voice which is very active and alive throughout the length and width of the country continuously bridging the gap between various religious and social factions, and have a significant role to play in future as well.

Keywords : Indian cinema, mediating voice, Sufi, yoga practice
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