

***Tabarruk* upon the ancient union of Chivalry and Mysticism and its present-day scion**

(Introduction to Pir Zia's Saracen Chivalry)

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Chivalry, knighthood, *futuwwa* has been the first cultural current in which the then radiant Islamic and nascent European civilizations, at the level of personal recognition, could exchange appreciation and respect. It is that which renews its relevance in today's world. The neighborly confrontation is yet again with us. And evinces precious little mutual concern beyond media sensationalism, discarding available scholarship findings.

Every single civilization we know casts its shadows of endemic violence, personal insecurity, ideological justification, almost commensurate to its brilliance—our own experience from, say, the early 20th century to the present, demonstrates one, more than sobering example, thereof.

Chivalry too, did not of course arise as the idealized idyll it later became through its poetry and song, its evolving values, its ideally selfless sense of honor and all the colorful artistic and moral imagery of perpetually renascent literature. Transcending, however, the prejudices of the political and churchly roots to which it nevertheless stayed closely connected, in chivalry an adversary could become, rather than an unbeliever to be annihilated, a human being of like disposition, to be considered as such.

No narrow religious prejudice, but something of a temporal, secularizing trend in Europe created its first, never quite peaceful but no longer barbarous culture. And in time that was to expand into the Renaissance, the 18th-century *crise de la conscience européenne* and Enlightenment, the 19th-century Romanticism, with its cult of the knight's lineal descendant, the gentleman, and the humanitarianism of our present day.

In Islam, Baghdad was, Damascus remained, Cordoba as yet figured as, the greatest centers of civilization west of China (Byzantium by then a still-impressive runner-up). Its *futuwwa* included groups of other names but similar standards. Courtesy, social disciplines, ethical and aesthetic sensitivity had long pedigrees. Out of the Muslim *'umma* had grown the Islamic *khassa*, from caring horsemanship had sprung the self-respecting, hence self-restraining chivalry of Syrian and Spanish knights. Within their ranks, as within those of their East-European successors, Chivalry and

mysticism fused. The Indian Sufi yoga of seven degrees had its counterpart in the earlier Sufi training method of the *maqamat* and *halat*: stages and states. An ethical-psychological course that might range from seven to the forty-five steps of its classical codification in al-Qushairi's *Risala* of 1046.¹ At about two-thirds of the way, as its 28th step, follows the vital one of *dhikr* (*zikr*), central to all Sufi observance. Immediately following that (instead of the four last yoga-style breathing and interiorization practices of the Indian Sufi system), follows *futuwwa*, Chivalry: self-transcending commitment to fellow-men and humane values. (*Futuwwa* then followed up through the next two steps of insight (*firasa*) and moral nobility (*khuluq 'azim*).

Now, spanning the centuries, one arrives at the modern Indian Sufism of the veritable *waliullah* (saint) Hazrat Inayat Khan, the poet-philosopher and musician-mystic, of the then Indian state of Baroda (1882-1927). His life's search in time became to evolve a renewal of the traditionally all-embracing Indian spiritual awareness, in his case in its Mughal Indian-Sufi articulation, into a comprehensive philosophy, meditative practice and worldview for modern men and women in a secular age, confronted with one-sided but domineering materialism. His achievements may be said to be threefold. First, he spoke for Indian contemplative philosophy and meditative mysticism *as a whole*, not confined to one or the other of the religious or philosophical traditions out of which the shared dimension of mystical realization forever again arises. Then as an Indian, culturally Mughal, Muslim he embodied as well a modernizing evolution of the classical Sufi tradition arising out of the mystical currents and concepts within, and evolved out of, the Qur'anic Revelation itself. And thirdly his work naturally is in particular a record of everything that his brilliantly creative genius added to all those riches through his own perception, contemplation, and vision. It is that which gives its singular fascination for contemporary, and doubtless future, human life and contemplative thought generally.

1

It is noteworthy that at this early stage, here one already finds a cultivation of *futuwwa*, chivalry, leading to its full, and functional, spiritualization. Between Persia and Portugal, the *ribat* (hermitage) might be both a dervish center of ascetic and ethical disciplines and one housing knights whose martial mysticism inculcated standards of confrontational combat. From that Andalusian model, the later great Spanish military order (Calatrata, Santiago, Alcántara) took their cue. The *murabit* might be a saint or a knight (or both!).

Here, the obvious question remains how Hazrat Inayat Khan himself related to the concepts of chivalry and knighthood and to their connection with aristocracy as a normative, cultural and psychological set of values and standards potentially open to every civilized individual. In a poem Hazrat Inayat Khan indicates that before anyone can become wise, then holy, and ultimately a superior personality, he first is to become a gentleman. He sets standards for each level of development indicated in his *Vadan* booklet of poems and sayings which contains Iron, Copper, Silver and Golden Rules addressed to “My conscientious self”, combining spiritual, ethical and chivalrous prescriptions. In addition, there are two extraordinary poems in which Hazrat Inayat Khan seeks fully to spiritualize and adapt chivalry to modern times, and in which he identifies the aspiring Knight Errant with the ascetic adept and the mystical quest of his ever-veiled Love. The first poem begins, “Riding on the horse of hope”, and the second ends in Love’s voice: “No, still further am I” since self-transcending, i.e. genuine, love lies yet beyond the self-exertion of the search.

Hazrat Inayat Khan initially defined the Sufi Order he authorized as “the Order of Purity” and, in addition to his deputy initiators and leaders, he went on to appoint “Knights of Purity” and “Heralds”. As contrasted with the ranks and levels of nobility, or more generally, of aristocracy, Knighthood implies equality, but at a truly demanding level of obligations, style of manners, humanitarianism and aesthetic sensitivity, which calls for self-discipline, training and education.

This reinvigorated togetherness of mysticism and chivalry in a significant sense crystallizes Hazrat Inayat Khan’s own, long-established background and breeding. He shared those with his brother, Mir Pyarumiyan Maheboob Khan and cousin, Jagirdar Muhammad Ali Khan, with both of whom in 1910 he set out to gain the experience of the fabled Occident. As their time there continued beyond all erstwhile intention, their 1910 triumvirate grew into the very embodiment of Hazrat’s musico-mystical values.

Then, in addition, his own celebrated *ism-laqab* (name-title) of Inayat Khan continued, indeed enhanced its renown in India as in the West, due to two descendants of historical stature in their own right. Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan, the elder of his two sons, strikingly succeeded in making far more widely known his father’s life’s work: the modernizing renewal of Sufi mysticism and art of life (worldview). That resulted from his extension of it well beyond what originally had been largely a select, leisured-class audience and

readership, hence none too outward looking beyond their circles. All the honor of heroic tragedy attaches to the paternal identity as borne by the elder of Hazrat's two daughters, Pirzadi Noorunnisa Inayat Khan, also known by her World War II SOE codename as the famous "Madeleine." Having volunteered to apply her bilingual fluency in service of the British secret service as a wireless transmitter in France, her own exceptional talents were cut short so tragically by her murder in the concentration camp in Dachau in 1944. With two full length biographies², countless memorial articles, reference mentions or entries, commemorative films as also novels inspired by her life, and reprints of her own book of Buddhist Jataka tales, she too requires no further introduction here. In her, uncalculating, selfless, truly mystical idealism fused with chivalry's unmistakable, visceral sense of defiant bravery, loyalty, and honor. Though aware of deadly danger, she refused to return to the safety of Britain until her secret work in France could be taken over by a replacement not, like she herself, known and sought by the Nazi persecutors. In Nazi captivity, she proudly refused to give her word no longer to seek to escape. Thus identified as not merely uncooperative but intractable, she was chained in her German prison, then ultimately tortured into terrible martyrdom. Even then, her once more proudly defiant last utterance was *Liberté*. Had she not sung, along with the other three children, Hazrat's *kirtan* poem: "Save us from this ocean of life; all the world is false, and false are those attracted by it"? The rich culture of chivalry and the martial mysticism of knighthood always have been the two sides of one moral coin. In the treasury of human values, the place of Pirzadi Noorunnisa's golden carats is certain to be an abiding one.

From the 1910 Sufi triumvirate, as from the Inayat Khan trimurti, the connection to Queen Belacane's current chronicler is a singularly direct one. The proverbial "joy of the journey," however, presupposes taking in some scenic landscapes as well.

2

Jean Overton Fuller's 1952 best-seller *Madeleine*, later reprinted as *Born to Sacrifice* (alluding to the self-sacrificial tenet of her *Jataka Tales*), and re-edited as Noorunnisa Inayat-Khan; and Shrabani Basu's *Spy Princess* (2006), rich in additional data and documentation released during the intervening half-century. Based on (not invariably accurate) recollections of her younger sister Khairunnisa, *We Rubies Four* (2011) focuses more directly on their early Suresnes years.

In emphasizing anew the value of chivalry (*futuwwa*) for the ethics, the social and intellectual attitudes, and the cultural implementation of genuine mysticism, our author, Pir Zia Inayat-Khan, could naturally draw from the rich source of the Sufi philosophy and practice of his grandfather, Hazrat Inayat Khan.

Even so, in analyzing our author and his work hitherto, one may discern a pattern of Sufi continuity with earlier generations. Pir Zia's own oldest known paternal ancestors themselves were mounted nomads roaming the endless steppes of Turkistan, as *yuzkhans* – khans of a Horde. That doubtless deriving from the far greater tribal confederacies grouped under this comprehensive term for horsemen on the move. Their own ancestral horde would have been a very much smaller affair; but the terms were emphatically employed so as to insist on the sovereign khanical independence of even a limited but widely roving kinship unit and its leaders. At some early but undatable stage, their horde became sedentarised and then, it was their land that continued to be defined as *yuz*, with still its *khans* in charge, now as some kind of settled squires. That naturally did not mean that their horsemanship thereby was abandoned, maybe it was even upgraded: land and horse would have jointly cultivated and strengthened each other, there too. With the outbreak of Timur Lenk's destructive campaigns, along with a wave of refugees, they made for India, and secured their settlement on new lands in the northern Punjab.

In India, one of their epithets became *ashraf-i atrak*, Central Asian immigrants, but further, some significance may well be attached to their other very ancient capacity in addition to *yuzkhan*, i.e. that of *bakhshi*, indicating the clan shamans, the wise old men, whilst the younger set took action as *yuzkhans*. Elementarily, those *bakhshis* in addition to maintaining considered opinions and kinship traditions were in charge of incantation, as for religio-magical or healing purposes, highly functional in martial mounted days and apt for further elaboration upon sedentarization. Even still, during the first quarter of the 20th century, Pir Zia's eldest granduncle (d. 1924), a real repository of family lore, was called Maher Bakhshi, "the able *bakhshi*." Music and mysticism become practically a family "dharma" throughout their sixteen generations in India, and still had its roots in the *sarangi*-sounding horsemanship and *qira'at*-intoning squirarchy in the wide wastelands of Turkistan. It is said that only in the 19th century, did loss of land lead to a more world-renouncing practice of mysticism, as to still ascetic, carefully controlled professionalization of classical Indian music and, on the other

hand, to a rather unlucky return to the martial arts.³ All that may have strengthened further a traditional, hugely emphatic kinship ethos cultivated throughout the generations. Reflection on and transmission of both ethical and aesthetic values, personal standards, spiritual attunements, in all ages and circumstances remained vivid and cannot but have originated with the *yuzkhans* and *bakhshis* of old, and in evolving and adapting these lost nothing of their admonitory emphasis.

Seen against that historical background and within such a biographical framework to stimulate his personal potential and qualifications, it seems safe to assert, or rather to confirm the obvious in saying, that none could be better qualified, indeed, entitled to follow in the footsteps of Queen Belacane than the author of this splendid book. Pir Zia is the eldest son of Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan, born in 1971. He received his B.A. (Hons), in Persian, from the London School of Oriental and African Studies and his Ph.D., in Religion, from Duke University. Since 2004, he has served as succeeding President of the Sufi Order International and as his grandfather's *sajjada nashin* (spiritual heir). The Order International is now active in four continents, with its central quarters in the USA and France. In between his lecture tours and teaching travels, it is at those that Pir Zia alternately resides with his four-member family since having married back into the Indian Maulabakhsh family from which Hazrat Inayat Khan and his Brothers themselves descended.

Our author inherited the title of *pir* in 2000 from his father, who nominated Pir Zia as his successor to that highly demanding charge in a moving celebration at their French mansion years before, when Pir Zia was ten years old.

In India, initiatives used to be taken by a kinship unit jointly as consistently as in today's world such are taken individually. Wholly in kind, the 1910 Sufi triumvirate by 2010, in the third generation has been centered on single successor. However inspiring a responsibility, a pretty daunting challenge too!

3

Chivalrous horsemanship, for which Hazrat Inayat Khan's grandfather Mashaikh Bahadur Khan still remained remembered, by then must have proved obsolete vis-à-vis impersonal, long-distance weaponry!

However, if old eyes do not idealize too subjectively, in analyzing our author and his work hitherto, one might well discern a pattern of lineage continuity. In examining Pir Zia Khan's person and publications, one is certain to observe something of the lively poetic flair and incisive esoteric perception of Hazrat Inayat Khan, of the subtle and sophisticated wisdom and immense considerateness of his great uncle Shaikh-ul-Mashaik Maheboob Khan, of the impressive capacity of turning intense spiritual realization into practical expression of the other great uncle Pir-o-Murshid Muhammad Ali Khan. Certain strands deriving from that original triumvirate long known as, respectively, the *Insan al-Kamil* (perfective being), the saint and the master of Sufism, now duly and hopefully would seem to radiate promisingly in and from their young spokesman, Pir Zia, their grandson and grandnephew. Which is not of course to discard his very own and original creativity and conceptual range, or his attunement to present-day life and culture; but authenticity is always a composite.

And so, what better hope for Hazrat Inayat Khan's precious life's work, Mir Maheboob Khan's resounding Sufi songs, Jagirdar Muhammad Ali Khan's sense of practical application, to continue flourishing by ever further illuminating their heir and successor and thereby the Sufi path in all of its many courses? Seen from this point of view, the present writer's *tabarruk* may be bestowed on the profound wisdom of Queen Belacane's counsels, on the renewed life-giving fusion of *tasawwuf* and *futuwwa*, mysticism and chivalry, for our novel day and age, and above all else upon our Inayatide author, Pir Zia Khan. But as well accompanied by a heartfelt, thankful *mash'allah* for all three of these at this point in time, and for tomorrow's future, let our trustfully hoped for *barakatuhu* be accompanied by our Andalusians' *ojalá*, their European rendering of the universal Islamic *insha'llah!*