

Social Role of the Sufis: Concept and Practice of Langar in Medieval India

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Abstract

Irrespective of caste, color, creed, age gender, and social status, Langar represents the principle of equality among all the people of every religion. Langar became very dominant phenomena in sub continent which was also later adopted by the Sikh gurus. The Khanqahs and Gurdwaras provided a home-like place for the marginalized community. In different periods the rulers patronized it through lands or stipends and tried to institutionalize it. The aim of this study is to provide detailed information about the free kitchen (Langar) and how it creates interfaith harmony because all the food is free and is offered to everyone who visits any khanqah or the gurdwara regardless of their faith. Different faiths have different food laws for example; Muslims are able to eat halal meat and cannot eat pork, gurdwara serves only vegetarian food in order to make it inclusive of all faiths. This study aims to trace the influence and patronization of these religious places and free kitchen (Langar) by various rulers as well. This study will explore to understand the four Sufi silslas (orders) especially the Chishti Sufi silsila and the concept of Peer/Sufi/Murshad and mureed/disciple. Various rulers patronized and allocated lands and fixed stipends for various religious institutions to achieve particular purposes.

Keywords: Langar (Free kitchen), Sufi, Poor, Sikhs, Welfare trust, Endowments, Stipends, Institutionalization.

Introduction

Langar is an embodiment of transparency, a support of ethics, and a foundation of incorporation, acknowledgment, and affirmation, practice that facilitates equity and advances value. Something that obscures pecking orders and diffuses limits, a medium that values regard, trust, value, and sympathy, a practice of sharing and mindful, that sees everybody as equivalent, a support of sustenance. The *Langar* custom is established in the Muslim standards of fairness, modesty, and local area administration. It is a public kitchen where free meals are given to all, no matter what their position, statement of faith, religion, or economic position. The act of *Langar* addresses a takeoff from the conventional normal practices of now is the right time, underlining the unity of mankind.

While ideas of noble cause and local area feasts exist in different strict customs, the *Langar* in Islam and Sufism has exceptional qualities and a particular profound and libertarian reasoning behind its foundation. Muslim Sufis started and engendered the *Langar* as a basic piece of Sufi character, and it keeps on being a focal part of Sikh practice and values. A huge understanding of *Langar* is presented by Pnina Werbner who imagines it as unending penance and as a demonstration of identity with an unbounded Muslim people group, the Ummah.¹

Origins of Langar

A substitute history of food exists past a mainstream history of food security. Taking care of the poor has an extraordinary spot place in community wellbeing. As per Mary Douglas, “gifts of food are streams of nurturing substance”.² It operates within “multiple symbolic systems at the same time to convey a combination of material, moral, social, and spiritual messages”.³ In Islamic practice, the endowment of food is esteemed profoundly. *Langar* is regularly conceptualized among Muslims, including most of pioneers to sanctums, not as a penance but rather as a holy person’s favoring for poor people (sarkaar kaa *Langar*), a singular approach to satisfying a wish, and a statement of appreciation to the holy person.

The Quran has over and again underlined to take care of the destitute. Islam made it basic to procure a phenomenological experience of the hungry by endorsing fasting during the sacred month of Ramadan. The profound activity of fasting develops a feeling of starvation, an ordinary reality for the large numbers of persecuted. It rouses an individual to feel the aggravation of others, to foster compassion for the hungry, and develop a moral

reasonableness. The Quran emphatically urges devotees to take care of the destitute for the sake of God and don't expect a return either in remuneration or appreciation.

A pertinent verse from the Quran summarizes the ethics of giving. 'We feed you for the sake of Allah alone: no reward do we desire from you, nor thanks (Quran 76: 9). A singular taking care of the desperate feels quick delight for recuperating a body from torment. It gives a feeling of happiness and fulfillment, a particular encounter that different demonstrations of goodness don't offer. Giving life to an individual deprived by taking care of the kept produces an inclination from significance and warmth. The Sufis were main successors to a custom of Islamic supernatural quality, and they have for the most part been seen as standing pretty much separated from the social request. Sufism is a significant idea that impacted religion in India in the archaic ages. There are numerous Sufi holy people whose *Dargahs* actually draw in individuals from everywhere the country regardless of their strict association. During archaic India, the kings and aristocrats frequently challenged among one another in recognizing the departed holy person through their contributions in building exercises. It is valuable to take note of that principally the significant, compelling and well-known sanctuaries got the support of the rulers and aristocrats in middle age India. It was a typical legitimizing process through which the rulers and blue-bloods attempted to improve their pictures among the honorability and the subject populace.

Langar has a long history in the Indo-Islamic milieu. Dervish frequently concedes delight by forfeiting his dinner, particularly the main slice of bread. One of the conventional jobs of the dervish stop was as local area kitchen and inn, giving food and haven to poor people and for voyagers. Many early *Sufis* were "sons of the road"⁴, wandering during the warm season, and relying on the grace of God and the spontaneous generosity of fellow *Sufis* for shelter and sustenance. Adherents of different beliefs additionally could depend on such liberality, without any inquiries posed to about their religion. Within Sufism, the Chishti Sufi order under the patronage of Khawaja Moin Uddin Chishti, also known as Gharib Nawaz, "*Benefactor of the Poor*", institutionalized the *Langar* in early thirteenth-century India. He made *Langar* an integral part of the Sufi practice. Later Sikh religion made it central to the core belief.⁵ In pre-modern India, *Langar* was a progressive practice. It permitted individuals to eat liberated from the apprehension about contaminating the dinner obliterating the exceptionally old rank orders. *Langar* freed low-rank individuals from the responsibility of sullying food, a discernment that had held the upper position in a consistent higher moral status.⁶ Thus, food and sharing dinners worked as character producers, made local area and fortitudes.

The foundation of the *Langar* was at that point well known in the twelfth and thirteenth hundred years among Sufis of the Indian subcontinent. The training developed and is recorded in the *Jawahir al-Faridi* ordered in 1623 CE.⁷ It was later, both the organization and term, embraced by every one of the Sufis. The food is served out of a monstrous pot called a deg in the regions of a dargah (Sufi hallowed place). The incomparable Chishti Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya was known to engage enormous gatherings of voyaging dervishes even at least thirty for as long as three days all at once. The three-day limit is with regards to Muhammad's advice: "Cordiality reaches out for three days, and anything past that is good cause".⁸ Ibn Batuta delighted and recorded such accommodation during his movements in the fourteenth 100 years, as did Evliya Efendi in the seventeenth hundred years.

The craving to share food was one reason for the improvement of networks, the Turkish word *tekke* alluded to a refectory or feasting lobby well before it turned out to be solely related to a Sufi foundation. With the improvement of orders and networks came a more prominent ability to serve more prominent numbers; however regardless of what its size, every Sufi community had lodgings held for visitors, and a position of high standing for them at the table.

The Persian word *Langar* was inseparable from a soup kitchen and resting place for explorers or a Sufi home. Ahmed Uzgani's to a great extent legendary "History of the Uwaysis" set in East Turkestan around 1600 CE, incorporates accounts of Sufi holy people who laid out *Langars* and went through years in this method of administration. Rumors from far and wide suggest that the kitchen of one of them, Ghiyath al-Racket of Shikarmat, was inexplicably conceded a boundless stockpile of fire and water. The many references to *sufis* participated in such work mirror the extraordinary worth connected to it, and the boundless presence of *Langars* all through Focal Asia.⁹

Social disparity, avoidance, and bias were imbued in the social texture of fourteenth century India. Society was profoundly defined, in view of position, religion, and occupation. Particular treatment and unfair practices saturated daily existence. Rank, religion, and occupation compelled admittance to spots of love and public social affairs. These limitations invaded guidelines of commensality.¹⁰

Brahmanical perspectives on immaculateness and contamination forbid upper and lower stations people to uninhibitedly mingle¹¹. All were not considered equivalent. *Sufis* stressed that all are equal,¹² disseminating principles of equal opportunity and social equality¹³. Chasing after civil rights, the Sufis imagined an equivalent society and presented regulated *Langar* where everybody could openly gather to cook, consume, and partake in a common dinner. This thought of aggregate commensality expanded the more prominent Muslims goals.

Langar was philosophically prepared as a mode of social change¹⁴, fitting as a instrument of communal freedom.¹⁵ Post Sufis, the strict seat advanced through nine replacements, each blessing the developing Sikh person with beliefs, qualities, and ideals. Sufis promoted *Langar* improving its supremacy in Sufis character. *Langar* stayed crucial to Muslim religio-social character,¹⁶ seeing everybody as equivalent and expected to eat together. The Sufis

drove lives which filled in as the reference point of light to their devotees, to become dynamic specialists in advancing human government assistance. They consequently worked with full usage of assets, human and material and energized all over improvement.

Dargah aroused the constructive genius in man by helping him to realize his fullest potential and progress in different walks of life. *Dargahs* (*Sufi* Temples) stands for the total orientation of life of the individual and society to a creative and meaningful existence. The *Langar* system stands for brotherhood, equity, equality, and humility.

To this sense and soul, *Langar* offers a common dinner as philosophical image of bringing together shared mentalities and obscuring social variations¹⁷. Initially *Langar* dinners were facilitated inside the spot of get together or *mazaar*. Such commonplaces are known as the Sufi *Dargahs* “entryway to the Sufis”¹⁸ or on the other hand the places of effortlessness like the advanced rendition of the Sikh sanctuary. After some time, these gatherings have spread to private houses and other social events. The dinner can now be congregated past the sanctuary limits assuming that the soul and goal of the feast accord with conventional *Langar* convictions and values.

One of the clearest indications of standing disparity in conventional Indian culture is the no against eating with those external one’s position bunch, of a lower station, or of an alternate religion. Rules for the sharing of food and water are many, particularly among high station Hindus. All along, the Sufis unequivocally dismissed this imbalance by asking that all are equivalent and participate in like manner food in the organization of each other. For *Langar*, ladies and men, rich and poor, high and low sit together. The *Langar* feast consequently pounces upon the inward center of imbalance and represents a Sikh’s own dismissal of bias.

By all accounts, contemporary *Langar* is a free dinner that truly and profoundly supports its purchaser. Underneath, it is a perplexing constitution of numerous philosophical aspects and social functionalities.

In his exemplary work on the creation of the English common laborers, E.P. Thompson shows the eighteenth century hunger ‘riots’ were the principal case of the rise of class cognizance among the general population.¹⁹ Hunger drove masses to fomentation, upset abusive designs, lighted class cognizance, and brought about state development. Frequently named as ‘riots’ in pilgrim chronicles, brought about by normal ‘starvations’, individuals’ battle for a decent amount of food keeps on molding state political and monetary construction. Notwithstanding, researchers expose the starvation account and have shown how the pioneer foul play approaches of food dispersion have prompted the passing of millions of individuals across the world.²⁰ For instance, the Bengal starvation of 1943 straightforwardly comes about because of English inability to give lawful privilege over food.²¹ All things considered, the frontier time ‘starvation strategy’ of English India set forth altruism as a prompt reaction to hunger. Be that as it may, magnanimity duplicated power relations and left large number of individuals devastated.²²

Molding *Langar* has no set plan or construction and comprises both substantial and elusive parts. We comprehensively sort these into three fundamental aspects: philosophical, procedural, and groundbreaking. This arrangement isn’t customary however intended to offer perusers setting and lucidity. Fundamentally, it integrates goals of equity, regard, benevolent assistance, noble cause, and cordiality. Understanding these goals implants the soul of *Langar* with ethics of incorporation, acknowledgment, and affirmation of others. *Langar* rejects imbalance, obscures limits, disintegrates ordered progressions and promotes inclusivity.

This way of thinking advances transparency, cooperation, sharing, and common nourishment, permitting us to perceive, acknowledge, and incorporate the qualities, thoughts, and presence of others. *Langar* theory energizes vote based thinking at individual and local area levels, forming resulting activities.

The change in the act of *Langar* is more apparent in the kinds of food and feasts advertised. The customary *Langar* at the places of worship comprises of humble food things like lentils and bread, fulfilling hunger and not impelling avarices. The present dastarkhawan, in any case, principally gives luxurious dishes of meat. Assortments of meat dishes made of lamb and hamburger are currently uninhibitedly and regularly served to the poor while giving choices to take as much food as possible for their loved ones. A gourmet specialist at the kitchen communicated his longing, ‘In the event that you like to take care of poor people, and do it sumptuously. Why serve biryani made of potato and rice just?’ The country’s most broad government assistance network Saylani presented meat, particularly sheep, into the dastarkhawan menu. The lamb is the most costly in Pakistan. The course demonstrates an adjustment of utilization designs from jam, margarine, and milkshakes to sheep, hamburger, and camel meat.

Prior to entering the *Langar* premises, heads ought to be covered with a spotless material, shoes eliminated, and hands washed. The substantial technique of *Langar* is straightforward yet the immaterial meanings are profound. These basic errands are reliant yet free of each other in a complicated manner. Every movement pursues the last dinner, yet they are not direct. All the while coordinated and equal, each independent errand finishes in the dinner’s planning, utilization, or end. Every action is subsequently both a method and an end. Volunteers can essentially partake in one action and afterward look for sustenance, ending their contribution there. Everybody can contribute (in whatever way) and eat (or not eat). It might appear to untouchables as a clear progression of exercises, however closer assessment uncovers that it is profoundly muddled and chiasmic.

Langar isn’t simply any sort of food. It isn’t common yet. All things being equal, *Langar* works evenly at the local area level and in an upward direction trying for God’s will. The two vectors shape the custom of taking care of the hungry. God sustains the ravenous, a proverbial truth that everybody figures out in Pakistan. Subsequently, *Langar*

is cosmologically confirmed 'how material assets and social practices connect people and gatherings with a power that rises above present social and political activity'.

A person who accommodates the poor has no office or filling in as a simple arbiter among God and the penniless. Consequently, moral activities don't emerge from the common universe of 'moral's feelings that guide our focus toward the enduring of others and make us need to cure them'.²³ God as an ontologically earlier decides individuals' reaction of really focusing on the other. 'Putting God in the frontal area, and the experiencing other behind the scenes, upsets both the liberal arrogance of empathy and the neoliberal basic of self improvement'.²⁴ A very famous incident related to *Langar* is also described by my elderly that

"Once an uncle of the Minister of Finance Mian Muhammad Yasin Khan Watto came to Pir Sahib to meet him. He was seriously ill, and had returned from England, diagnosed as suffering from an incurable illness. Pir Sahib cast dam (blew a Qur'anic verse for healing purposes) on him and said: 'Let him eat from the Langar's food and he will be cured'. Once healed, the Minister asked the Pir if he could make him, the Minister, his disciple, allow him to cast dam and provide the food for the Langar for three days. Zindapir said: 'You will provide for the Langar for three days but what will happen after that? I cannot make you partner, sharik, with God. Nor will I make you my disciple or allow you to cast dam'".²⁵

Allah made us, and He has composed the reason for our life. We can do nothing really great for anybody except if it is God's will. *Langar* is similar open, modifiable, and re-useful. People can enter and exit whenever, anytime, in any perspective. They might give as well as take. *Langar* manages the cost of sustenance. The whole motivation behind *Langar* is physical and otherworldly sustenance. One might feel sustained by taking, or by giving; once in a while by both. One may not celebrate the products of their own contributions. They are left for another person to sustain. What is significant is the soul of interest through the making the contribution.

Resistance and transformation in *Langar*

The powers of *Langar* are two-overlay: resistive and groundbreaking. *Langar* turned out to be more than a commensally practice of sharing food. It was a site of social, political, and social opposition, a locus of challenge and discussion²⁶. *Langar* was a provocative socio-cultural model that the Muslim Sufis created to challenge the pervasive disparities. These resistive powers incited groundbreaking ability, opposing business as usual, looking for change, and empowering change. The way of thinking and interaction of *Langar* opened shut spots to add new friendly, political, and social aspects. *Langar* eradicated limits and intruded on orders to engage everybody as equivalent. It offered useful and ideational decision and opportunity. Both the supplier and the individual who ate his/her fill at the *Langar* discovered a sense of harmony.

Conclusion

The Islamic custom puts extraordinary accentuation on aiding the less lucky, taking care of the hungry, and dealing with those out of luck. This guideline is gotten from the lessons of the Quran and the model set by Prophet Muhammad (harmony arrive), who was known for his liberality and worry for the government assistance of others. *Langar* is a vital piece of the Sufi spiritualist practice as well as among every one of the primary religions of the world. The *Langar* assumed extremely prevailing part in the proliferation of Islam and spread of otherworldly practices of Islam those are safeguarding the premise of Islam values and standards. In the middle age India, the Sufis spiritualists were drawing in the majority through the free contribution of *Langar* to all with practically no segregation. The Sikhism likewise embraced the idea of free *Langar* and the free food is served round the globe with next to no separation of station, variety or religion.

The *Langar* affected the Indian culture and impacted the cultural texture of Indian country which pulled in the majority particularly the lower classes in Sub Mainland. The free *Langar* particularly in Chistiya silsila contributed well and the spread of Islam was additionally credited concerning it. Indeed, even till to date, in Pakistan the peculiarities of free *Langar* is boundless idea. Humanistically, the free *Langar* is additionally a significant help to poor people and penniless those are looking for food and a lot of their endurance and presence in light of the free food. The *Langar* custom is profoundly implanted in Sufi way of thinking, underlining ideas like sacrificial help, lowliness, and the unity of humankind. It mirrors the spiritualist confidence in separating social obstructions and approaching all people with deference and nobility.

Holy Quran has stressed to take care of the poverty stricken, Islam made it basic to get a phenomenological experience of the hungry by recommending fasting during the sacred month of Ramadan which strikes our psyches to be familiar with the yearning. The otherworldly activity of fasting develops a feeling of starvation a regular reality for the large numbers of persecuted. It propels an individual to feel the aggravation of others, to foster sympathy for the hungry, and develop a moral reasonableness. The Quran firmly urges devotees to take care of the penniless for the sake of God and don't expect a return either in remuneration or appreciation. A relevant section from the Quran sums up the morals of giving. 'We feed you for Allah alone: no award do we want from you, nor much obliged (Quran 76: 9). A singular taking care of the desperate feels prompt satisfaction for recuperating a body from misery. It gives a feeling of euphoria and fulfillment, a particular encounter that different demonstrations of goodness don't offer. Giving life to an individual deprived by taking care of the kept creates an inclination from significance and warmth.

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