

Biography of Hazrat Inayat Khan

Hazrat Inayat Khan (5th July 1882 - 5th February 1927) came to the West as a representative of the highest musical traditions of his native India, and brought with him a message of love, harmony, and beauty that was both the quintessence of Sufi teaching and a revolutionary approach to the harmonizing of Western and Eastern spirituality. His nephew, Shaikh al-Mashaik Mahmood Khan, describes him as “poet-philosopher and musician-mystic”.

Inayat Khan was born in Baroda (now Vadodera), Gujerat and his early life primarily revolved around music. His grandfather, known as Moula Bakhsh, was a great musician who founded a music school, the Gayanshala, which is still flourishing today. Inayat Khan dedicated his early life to the mastery of the subtle intricacies of classical Indian music, winning the high title of Tansen from the Nizam of Hyderabad, a powerful ruler and renowned patron of the musical arts.

His Sufi teacher was Shaykh al-Mashaykh Sayyid Muhammad Abu Hashim Madani, who trained him in the ways of the Chishti Order, and also in the practices of the Naqshbandi, Qadiri, and Suhrawardi orders. He was an eager pupil, and visited his teacher every day. *The Confessions of Inayat Khan*, compiled by Regina Miriam Bloch and published in 1915 is a collection of stories of Murshid: *“I still recall this period, under the guidance of so great and merciful a Murshid as the most beautiful time of my life. In him I saw every rare quality, while his unassuming nature and his fine modesty could hardly be equalled even among the highest mystics of the world. He combined within himself the intense spell of ecstasy and constant flow of inspiration, with the very soul of spiritual independence.”*

After four years, his teacher, who was elderly, came to know that he was dying, his words to Inayat were: *“Fare forth into the world, my child, and harmonize the East and the West with the harmony of thy music. Spread the wisdom of Sufism abroad, for to this end art thou gifted by Allah, the most merciful and compassionate.”* Biography, p.111

On 13 September 1910 Inayat Khan left India for America with his brother Maheboob and cousin Muhammed Ali. He travelled in America until 1912 when he went to Europe. He was based in England until 1920 when he left for France, eventually setting up residence in Suresnes, a suburb of Paris. He had met Ora Ray Baker in America. She followed him to London and they married on 20th March 1913. They had four children Noorunissa, born 1st January 1914 in Russia, Vilayat born 19th June 1916, London, Hidayat born 6th August 1917, London and Khair-un-nissa born 3rd June 1919, London. Inayat Khan travelled widely throughout Europe and twice returned to the United States, offering the Sufi Message to all who were ready to hear it. His lectures were transcribed and edited by his students to create the series which is known as The Sufi Message volumes. As these volumes had been heavily edited the Nekbakht Foundation began a new series, The Complete Works of Pir-o-Murshid Hazrat Inayat Khan. The publications can be downloaded from this site or bought from Omega Publications. They have been produced by working with the original manuscripts to establish a text as close as possible to what Inayat Khan actually said.

During his sixteen years in the West, he created a school of spiritual training based upon the traditional teachings of the Chishti Sufis, and infused with a revolutionary vision of the unity of religious ideals and the awakening of humanity to the divinity within. In his unique form of Sufism, there are no barriers of race, creed or religion. He did not see Sufism as a religion, but rather a way of life that enhances and fulfills every religion. He said *“Sufism is not a religion*

or a philosophy, it is neither deism nor atheism, nor is it a moral, nor a special kind of mysticism, being free from the usual religious sectarianism. If ever it could be called a religion, it would only be as a religion of love, harmony, and beauty.” Social Gathekas – 3. Sufism – Beyond Religion. In 1926 he was becoming physically exhausted from his schedule of travel and work and suffered from repeated bouts of pneumonia, he decided therefore to go on a visit to India. However, his fame had reached India, and he found himself once again travelling to spread his Message, and while travelling he once again came down with pneumonia.

Following a brief period of illness, Inayat Khan departed from this world in Delhi on 5 February 1927, at a house called Tilak Lodge, near the banks of the river Yamuna in the north eastern part of Delhi. His Dargah (grave) is in Nizamuddin West in New Delhi, and receives visitors from around the world.