

SUFISM



Having been informed that the history students of Class 11 and Class 12 would be attending a talk on Sufism, we all entered the Conference room of our school and sat down on the floor in front of Mr. Dilip Shankar, the man who was here to interact with us.

We had been expecting an informative, factual description of Sufism. And instead, what we got was a distinguished-looking, lively man singing to us in a clear voice. What he sang was a small section of a Baul song illustrating how people who were truly devoted to God, and are revered today, were considered ‘fools’ in their own time. Before he had even begun speaking, he had managed to wow all of us.

The song was lovely, but the real magic began when he started talking to us. Mr. Shankar spoke to us about Sufism, about spirituality, and what it all really means. He talked about how a Sufi is always on a quest for knowledge. He described it as a never-ending hunger to truly understand yourself and your connection to God.

He talked about the beautiful relationship between a guru and his student, and more importantly, the relationship between God and a true devotee. He narrated beautiful anecdotes, the most striking one being about the renowned Sufi poet, Rabia al-Basri. Upon being challenged to walk upon water, Rabia threw up her prayer mat into the air, before flying up to it and sitting on it while it was still in the air. Later, she said to the one who had challenged her, “Fish and birds can swim and fly better than us. That is not what we are here to do. We are here to work on ourselves, so we can work for others.”

Mr. Shankar wanted us to understand the importance of cultivating our own selves so as to be able to truly help others. He said, “Only if you are selfish, can you become selfless.” He talked about how we were privileged for being able to seek education. He mentioned working with street children and prisoners who do not have this privilege.

After conclusion of the session, we were allowed to ask questions. A student asked Mr. Shankar about finding answers and Mr. Shankar said these beautiful words, “It’s about living the questions, not about finding the answers.” Another student asked him about how and when he realised that he was a Sufi. His reply was, “I don’t know if I am a Sufi. I’m still searching, I think we all are.” We were all inspired by his words, and requested him to come back to talk to us again soon.