

The Context and the Audience of the Early *Malfuz* Writings in India

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From the early days of the evolution of Sufism, there has been a strong tendency among the Sufis to preserve the sayings and observations of eminent Sufi masters. Even the earliest books on Sufism are full of such statements. For the purposes of explaining the principles and teachings of Sufism, the Sufis have invariably relied on sayings, stories and anecdotes of earlier Sufis. However, *malfuzāt*, or “collections of a saint’s utterances,” as a genre of Sufi literature embodying not only the discourses of the Sufi masters but also the recording of the actual proceedings of their assemblies and preserving its oral quality, is more likely to have developed in India. Apparently it has no precedent.

The tendency to record the oral teachings of the Sufi Shaikhs has been rightly traced to the influence of *Hadith* literature (Ernst, pp. 63-64, 82). It is noteworthy in this context that the great concern for the accuracy and authenticity of the sayings and actions of the prophet, which contribute the *Hadith*, is lacking in the case of *malfuzāt*. No methodology or tools were ever developed for the textual and internal scrutiny of the contents of these statements to determine the degree of their authenticity. The more bizarre and out of the ordinary the statements seemed, the greater appeal they had for those who had faith in them. In such circumstances there remains much possibility of additions, interpolations and distortions of what actually the Sufi masters have said. Over a period of time these sayings acquired a halo of sanctity and became the very essence and soul of Sufism, and any attempt to question their contents was frowned upon.

Besides the science of *Hadith*, certain other developments taking place in the Arabic language are more likely to have influenced the conception of *malfuzāt*. During the early Islamic centuries, there was a well-established tradition relating to the teaching of *Hadith* and other sciences known as *emlā’*. Specialists in different branches of learning used to dictate (*emlā’*) to the students who sat around them with pen and paper and wrote down each and every word spoken by the teacher. In this way complete books were prepared, which came to be known as *amāli*. A vast literature belonging to this genre was produced, and some of these works

acquired great reputation for the level of their scholarship (Hājji Khalifa, I, pp. 147-48). But *amāli* were not spontaneous oral expressions of the scholars who delivered them, as is the case with the *malfuzāt*. They were carefully planned and fully organised lectures on selected themes (Abd al Salam Harun, introduction, pp. 22-23; Dahkhod, s.v.). There are some references of the use of this method by the Sufi masters also. For example, some chapters of the celebrated Sufi manual, Sohravardi's *Awāref al-ma'āref* (pp. 44, 47, 62-64), were dictated.

Nearer to *malfuzāt* in the Arabic language, however, is the genre known as *majāles* or *majālasāt* literature.¹ The books belonging to the genre consist of the proceedings of the academic discussions of eminent scholars in the fields of literature, linguistics, philology, etc. These discourses were mostly taken up on the spur of the moment or in response to some query from the members of the audience and were transcribed by some of the participants. But in spite of the apparent similarity with the *malfuz* literature, there are some vital differences that distinguish *majāles* from *malfuzāt*. First, *majāles* was recorded on the spot in its entirety as the discussion progressed; second, it seems that no choice or discretion rested with the compiler; and, third, the scholars always quoted their authority with full *esnād* (chain of narrators) (Hārun's Introd. to Thalab, pp. 23-24). The *malfuzāt*, in contrast, were recorded later. They were never recorded in their totality and much choice rested with the compiler. Moreover, the Sufi master did not always feel obliged to quote his authority. Most of the time, he said whatever he had to say on his own authority. Further, the kind of free and frank discussion and debate which in most of the cases characterized the *majāles* literature, in which the audience could make queries, argue and present conflicting points of view, was not possible in a Sufi assembly. Respectful queries apart, debate and argument were out of the question. It is quite likely that those who laid the foundation of *malfuz* literature in India were familiar with the tradition of *amāli* (Sejzi, pp. 237-8), but most probably they were not aware of the developments that had taken place in the field of *majāles*. At least no such awareness is reflected in their writings.

¹ A vast literature exists on the subject of *majāles*. Hājji Khalifa (I, pp. 147-49, 278-79) and Ebn al-Nadim (pp. 58, 197, 203, 245, 296, 230) give the names of a number of such books. Among the best books of the genre is *Majāles Thalab* of Abu'l-'Abbās Ahmad b. Yahyā Thalab (200-91/815-904). It contains discourses of Thalab on a variety of subjects including the Koran, *Hadith*, *feqh*, etc., but the bulk of the discussions relate to grammar, linguistics and literature. For a brief sketch of Thalab, see Hārun's Introd., pp. 1-23.

The word *malfuz* is exclusively used to denote the oral transmissions and discourses of the Sufis (Nizami, 1983, p. 163). Though *malfuzāt* as a genre of Sufi literature received its form and content most probably in India during the Delhi sultanate, it is generally believed that its first prototypes had already been compiled long ago outside India, which would seem to be extremely doubtful. It is no doubt true that a very large corpus of the sayings and anecdotes of the early Sufis was preserved in the books dealing with various aspects of Sufism. These were highly valued by the succeeding generations of the Sufis, and they invariably used them for the purposes of explaining complex concepts of Sufism and making them comprehensible to their audience. It, however, would be perhaps not correct to describe these books containing stray and unconnected sayings of the Sufi masters as the precursors of the *malfuz* literature.

The biographies of Shaikh Abu Sa'īd Abi'l-Khayr (d.1049) and the sayings of Abu Yazid Bestāmi as contained in *Ketāb al-nur* are included among the books that are commonly mentioned as providing the early models of *malfuzāt*. A close examination of these books, however, would reveal that that is not the case. Mohammad b. Monawwar's *Asrār al tawhid* is basically a biography of Shaikh Abu Sa'īd, wherein a section is devoted to his sayings, which Mohammad-Taqi Bahār considered to be authentic (Muhammad b. Monawwar, pp. 9, 11; Bahār, II, pp. 198-99). Nevertheless, even if the problems attendant on this assumption are ignored and the long time gap of a century and half between the death of the Shaikh Abu Sa'īd and the compilation of the book is disregarded, and the sayings incorporated in the book are accepted as genuine, it would be still rather difficult to accept them as a precursor of *malfuzāt*. The compiler himself has described (p. 9) these sayings as "scattered morals and subtleties contained in his sayings" (*fawā'ed wa nokāt-e parāganda az sokhanān-e u*). These scattered and unconnected sayings of the Shaikh have been compiled and put together without any system or arrangement. In reality they are in the nature of the sayings of earlier Sufis so profusely scattered in the books on Sufism; the only difference is that these emanate from one single individual. It would, therefore, not be appropriate to designate it as a collection of *malfuzāt*. Almost similar is the case of Salhaji's *Ketāb al-nur men kalemāt Abi Tayfur*. Like *Asrār al tawhid*, here also stray and altogether unconnected observations and sayings have been compiled in book form without any thematic or some other arrangement. Moreover, the sayings put together in the book are not meant for any particular audience. Most of these belong to the category of *shatahāt*, which are uttered in a condition of ecstasy and generally consist of ideas and concepts beyond the comprehension of

common people.² It would, therefore, not be appropriate to either liken it with the *Hadith* or designate it as a *malfuz* collection.

In spite of their significance and importance, these discourses and their collections could not be classified as *malfuzāt* because, among other things, these do not contain the actual proceedings of the assemblies of the master and totally lack the oral quality which is the hallmark of *malfuz* literature. It would, therefore, not be unjustified to hold the view that the *malfuz* literature, as we know it, owes its origin to the genius of the Indian Cheshti Sufis. According to the general perception, the credit of introducing this particular genre of the Sufi literature goes to the fourteenth century poet and litterateur, Amir Hasan 'Alā' Sejzi, who recorded the oral discourses of his preceptor, Shaikh Nezām al-Din Awliyā'. His *Fawā'd al fo'ād* is not only a monument of the devotion of Sejzi towards his master but also a great contribution to Sufi literature. It provides some of the finest statements of Cheshti Sufi teachings and principles, and, as demonstrated in Muhammad Habib's study of the subject, the first *malfuz* collection, and hence the one that laid the foundation of this genre of the Sufi literature (Habib, pp. 365-433). Other *malfuzāt* collections that were considered to predate *Fawā'ed al-fo'ād*, are now believed to be apocryphal. They are supposed to have been commissioned by enterprising booksellers who wanted to cash in on the growing demand for such literature among the people.

Amir Hasan Sejzi commenced the compilation of the *Fawā'ed al-fo'ād* towards the beginning of Sha'bān 707/end of January 1308 and carried it to 20 Sha'bān 722/September 1322, well into the reign of first Toghloq ruler, Sultan Ghiyāth al-Din Toghloq (*Fawā'ed al-fo'ād*, pp.3,440). At the time of the commencement of its compilation, Sultan 'Alā' al-Din Khalji was at the zenith of his power and glory. He had suppressed rebellions, beaten back the Mongol threat from across the border and had successfully implemented economic reforms. Moreover, literature and arts flourished under him. Yet none of these events, even the king's name, are mentioned in the *Fawā'ed al-fo'ād*.³

The reign of Qotb al-Din Mobārak Khalji, who was the first ruler to adopt an openly hostile attitude towards the Shaikh, is covered by the *Fawā'ed al-fo'ād*, but there is no inkling of the anarchy that followed 'Alā' al-Din's death and the atrocities perpetrated by Malek Kāfur during

² For an in-depth discussion on *Shatahat* see Badawi, II, pp. 1-36.

³ For a general idea, see Lal, pp. 177-217. For an idea about the quantum of revenue, mode of its assessment and realization see Ziyā' al-Din Barani, pp. 281-89. In another context describing the submissiveness of the subjects during the reign of Sultan 'Alā' al-Din, Barani (p. 341), he states that they even sold their wives and children to pay the revenue. Also see Moreland, pp. 31-39.

his brief interregnum. It also does not provide any idea about the intense conflict that ensued between the Shaikh and the young Sultan that ended only with the assassination of the latter. Similarly, we do not come across any reference whatsoever about the brutal killing of the entire family of 'Alā' al-Din by Khosrow Khan, the supremacy of Barwaris, the continuation of a number of Shaikh's disciples in important positions under him, the acceptance of huge gift by the Shaikh from that ruler, the struggle between Ghāzi Malek and Khosrow Khan and the establishment of the Toghloq dynasty. This is all the more surprising as Ziyā' al-Din Barani, himself a disciple of the Shaikh, accuses Khosrow Khan of hatching a conspiracy to destroy Islam and Muslims.⁴ Similarly, relations of the Shaikh were far from cordial with the founder of Toghloq dynasty, Sultan Ghiyāth al-Din Toghloq. On the behest of the ulema opposed to the Shaikh, an assembly (*mahzar*) of the learned was convened to decide the legality of Sufi music (*samā'*) (Amir Khord, pp.120-21). Moreover, the Sultan died in an incident, which left much room for speculation. The later Cheshti traditions would attribute the death of the Sultan to the spiritual powers of the Shaikh (Sirhindi, p. 97). None of this finds even a remote echo in the pages of *Fawā'ed al-fo'ād*. The references to the contemporary situation are few and of extremely casual nature. It is quite surprising that even those issues, which had great bearing on the well being of the society in general and the Cheshtis in particular, could not find any echo in the discussions of the Shaikh. His assembly seems to have been fully insulated from the contemporary life. There is neither appreciation for the good things nor any concern for or condemnation of the bad things, although both were bound to affect the very society that he wanted to reform and redeem. This must have been due to some conscious policy, probably the Sufi concept of withdrawal from the world ('*ozlat*'), on the part of the Shaikh, because we know that he was a very sensitive person, and the miseries and afflictions of people deeply distressed him (Qalandar, pp. 105-6)

Hamid Qalandar's *Khayr al-majāles* is markedly different from the *Fawā'ed al-fo'ād* in this respect. All its 100 recorded assemblies relate to the early years of Sultan Firuz Shah Toghloq. Hamid Qalandar commenced compilation of the proceedings of the assemblies of Shaikh Nāser al-Din Cherāgh-e Dilli (d. 757/1356) in 754/1353 and carried it to 756/1355 (pp. 3, 289). While Shaikh Nāser al-Din, like his master, does

⁴ Barani, pp. 372-75, 396-99, 406-23; Lal, pp.266-70,286-88; Amir Khord, pp.160-61; Jamāli, p.110; Fereshta, II, p.397; Hājjī Dabir, III, p. 855. Tāj al-Molk Malek Wahid al-Din Qarshi, a disciple of the Shaikh, was appointed as vizier in the new dispensation (Barani, p. 410).

not dwell on contemporary political issues and developments, still ample inference could be drawn from its account about the prevailing conditions during that period, particularly in Delhi. The sense of intense gloom and nostalgia for the past, particularly for the reign of 'Alā' al-Din, that pervades the pages of *Khayr al-majāles*, lament of the decline in the fortunes of the Sufis and Sufism and mention of closure of a number of *langars* (free kitchens) etc. clearly indicate that not all was well, at least in the early years of Firuz Shah Toghloq. If a Sufi of the stature and eminence of Shaikh Nāser al-Din constantly talks about the hardships of the time, then there must have been something very seriously amiss.

Fawā'ed al-fo'ād, as noted earlier, lacks any indication that Shaikh Nezām al-Din Awliyā ever talked about 'Alā' al-Din and his many achievements or the rough edges of his government and his personal failings. His very special relationship with the Sultan, known from other sources, is not even alluded to in the entire book.⁵ In contrast, *Khayr al-majāles* speaks at length (pp. 139, 240-42) about 'Alā' al-Din's reign, and the prosperity and the comfort of life during that period. It graphically describes how common it was for the people to throw parties and how even the beggars could afford two quilts in the winter. Barani, the historian of the Sultanate period and a contemporary of Shaikh Nāser al-Din, who also happened to be a disciple of Shaikh Nezām al-Din Awliyā, had depicted Sultan 'Alā' al-Din as an ignorant arrogant, tyrannical ruler who did not have much regard for religion in his personal life or in the running of the government. He used to inflict very harsh punishments not sanctioned by the *shari'a*. He started the practice of eliminating entire families for the crime of individuals and entire communities for the fault of a few; even children and women were not spared. He betrayed deep propensity for extreme cruelty and hard-heartedness (Barani, pp. 235-37, 252-53, 262-64, 297, 330-31, 338-39, 354, 365-66). But he emerges from the pages of *Khayr al-majāles* as an ideal king whose every care was directed towards the welfare of the people and the Shaikh remembers him with kind words. It is clear from the account of *Khayr al-majāles* that people of Delhi held Sultan 'Alā' al-Din in great esteem and thronged to his grave and tied threads there for the fulfilment of their needs. The interesting thing is that Shaikh Nāser al-Din seems to agree with this estimation of the late Sultan.⁶

⁵ For a detailed discussion on the point see Zilli, pp. 54-108; Qalandar, pp. 185-88, 241.

⁶ The Shaikh is reported to have observed: "What a king Sultan 'Alā' al-Din had been, may peace of God be on him." Qalandar, p. 241-42.

Clearly, *Khayr al-majāles* provides a much better idea about the social and political context in which the discourses contained in the book were delivered and recorded. Hamid Qalandar does not enjoy the literary excellence of Amir Hasan Sejzi, who recorded the *malfuzāt* of Shaikh Nezām al-Din Awliyā', but he seems to have an eye for the detail and as a result succeeds in capturing the spirit of the time in a much better way than his predecessor could do. The towering figure of Shaikh Nezām al-Din overshadows everything else, while the simplicity and humility of Shaikh Nāser al-Din Cherāgh-e Dilli makes it possible for the author to feel and see beyond the immediate ambience and have an idea about the contemporary society as it existed with its strengths and failures.

The present study is a tentative attempt to work out the nature and extent of the audience of the two great Cheshti masters, Shaikh Nezām al-Din Awliyā' and Shaikh Nāser al-Din Cherāgh-e Dilli, as reflected in the *Fawā'id al-fo'ād* and *Khayr al-majāles*. The contrast could not have been more marked both in the personalities of the two illustrious saints as also the circumstances in which they lived and worked. It may, however, be stated that such an attempt is beset with serious limitations. One great limitation stems from the fact that the compilers, as a rule, did not consider it necessary to describe the members of the audience who happened to be present in the assembly, proceedings of which they were recording. It is only incidental that names of some of those present are mentioned. The focus remained on the master and what he said and did. The ambience as well as the audience did not matter much and at the best its importance was secondary. The most telling evidence that this was the case is complete absence of the name of the poet Amir Khosrow Dehlavi from the proceedings of the *Fawā'id al-fo'ād*. It is well known that Amir Khosrow was a disciple of Shaikh Nezām al-Din and was held in great affection by the shaikh and was a frequent visitor to the *Jamā'at-khāna*.⁷ Similarly, the names of some of the most prominent disciples of Shaikh Nezām al-Din are entirely absent from its pages. These include, among others, Shams al-Din Yahyā, Shaikh Qotb al-Din Monawwar, Fakhr al-Din Zarrādi, 'Alā' al-Din Nili, Shaikh Wajih al-Din Yusof. Successor of the Shaikh in Delhi, Shaikh Nāser al-Din Cherāgh-e Dilli is mentioned only once in the entire book (Sejzi, p. 73). Members of the royal household, nobility and government servants who constituted a sizeable number of his disciples are conspicuous by their total absence. Similarly, *Khayr al-majāles* does not contain the name of Mohammad Gesu Darāz. His name finds mention only in the 'Supplement' and the description

⁷ Amir Khosrow has been indirectly mentioned by Sejzi (p. 242) only once. For his closeness to the Shaikh, see Amir Khord, pp. 312-13.

clearly suggests that he did not receive *khelāfat* (vicarship) from Shaikh Nāser al-Din. It is said that Gesu Darāz, after washing the body of the Shaikh, took some cords from the cot on which the body was washed, wound it round his neck and declared that it was as good as a *kherqa* for him, but this does not seem to have been the case.⁸

Due to this paucity of evidence on the issue in the concerned *malfuzāt* collections, an attempt has been made to look for the names of the disciples of these two masters mentioned in other Sufi and non-Sufi sources as well in the belief that every disciple must have attended the discourses of his master at one time or the other. Even in this endeavour we have not been very successful, as these sources rarely refer to the names of the disciples except for those who were very prominent. It is also noteworthy that, by this time, as a result of the development of Sufi orders (*selselas*), the Sufis had mostly ceased to be itinerant, as was the case earlier. They were now established at some particular place and, as a result, they did not go to the people, people came to them. They were mainly concerned about those who came to them; they did not reach out to the people at large. The present study, though limited and tentative in nature, is an attempt to present a general idea about the Cheshti clientele from the beginning of its presence in India.

The mystical dimensions of Sufism, its philosophy, ethics and teachings and the related ideological issues naturally required a certain level of education for their comprehension. If the discourses of Shaikh Neẓām al-Din Awliyā' and Shaikh Nāser al-Din Cherāgh-e Dilli, as collected in the *Fawā'id al-fo'ād* and *Khayr al-majāles*, are any indication of the nature and level of discussions conducted in their assemblies, then those without a certain level of learning could hardly expect to derive much benefit from them. It is, therefore, not surprising that an overwhelming majority of their disciples consisted of those who possessed certain minimum level of education, which during the early days of the sultanate was still confined mostly to the people of upper classes but was increasingly percolating downwards to those sections of the society that had generally remained out of its purview.

Normally discussion at the Cheshti hospices during the period under consideration was conducted in Persian, which was the language of the culture and learned discourse and the official language of the Delhi Sultanate. More and more people were learning Persian but it was mostly confined to the educated classes and government servants. The first two masters of the Cheshti *selsela*, Shaikh Mo'in al-Din Cheshti and Shaikh

⁸ Qalandar, Supplement, pp. 287-88; Jamāli, pp. 1-2, 21. Gesu Darāz received *Khilafat* in 1356 some time before the death of Shaikh Nāser al-Din. See Sāmāni, pp. 25-26; Syed Shah Khusro Husaini, pp. 14, 32-34, nn.74, 75.

Qotb al-Din Bakhtiyār Kāki, were born and brought up outside India (Sejzi, pp. 192-93, 305). They must have faced problems in communicating with the masses, though the sources are silent about it.

The audience of the early Cheshtis apparently consisted of two distinct categories. The first category consisted of people with some level of learning and culture. They were drawn to the Sufi fold, in most of the cases, both by genuine interest in Sufi ideology as also by fascination with the personality and character of the individual Sufi master. *Morids* (disciples) and *khalifas* (successors) were mostly drawn from this class, which ensured the continuity of the Sufi tradition. There is, however, some evidence to suggest that this was not always the case, as the enrolment of some slaves and a rustic, presumably a new convert, who could not even understand how a *meswāk* was to be used, and the pranks of some unscrupulous disciples, to much annoyance of the Shaikh, would indicate.

The other category consisted of those who were drawn to the Sufis not necessarily because they were attracted by the finer aspects of mystic lore, but rather because they were impressed by the simple and virtuous lives of the Sufi masters. In many cases they were attracted by stories and legends regarding the miracles performed by them. They came to the *khānaqāh* impressed by this reputation of the master to receive *baraka* (grace). There were also those who had no other door to turn to for the redress of their grievances and relief from suffering and hardships of day to day life. These comprised different sections of the society, but the majority seems to have belonged to the masses.

Khawāja Mo‘in al-Din Cheshti, founder of Cheshti *selsela* in India, arrived⁹ in India during the reign of Sultan Shams al-Din Iltutmish (1210-35) and after short stays at Lahore and Delhi, settled at Ajmer, which had been only recently conquered. It is unfortunate that authentic details about his life and work are not available. *Fawā’ed al-fo’ād* and *Khayr al-majāles* hardly mention him and even the account of *Siyar al-awliyā’* provides little information about him (Sejzi, pp. 76, 346, 405; Amir Khord, pp. 55-58; Qalandar, pp. 8, 45, 52, 58). They contain the names of only two of his disciples, Shaikh Qotb al-Din Bakhtiyār Kāki and Shaikh Hamid al-Din Sufi of Nagore, who also rose to be his main

⁹ It is generally believed that Shaikh Mo‘in al-Din Cheshti came to India and settled at Ajmer while it was still the capital of the powerful Chauhan Empire and was ruled by Prithviraj; see Amir Khord, pp. 56-57. But Nagauri (d. 1274), an eminent disciple of Shaikh Mo‘in al-Din, clearly states (fol. 15) that he arrived in India during the reign of Sultan Shams al-Din Iltutmish. The evidence by Jamāli (p. 14) and Ghawsi (tr. p. 29) also supports the contention of Nagauri that the Khwaja arrived at Ajmer after its conquest by the Ghorids. See Amir Khord, p. 14.

khalifahs. Some later sources contain names of a few other disciples, most of whom apparently belonged to the category of ulema and the learned classes. The only name connected with the ruling class among his disciples is that of Sayyed Hosayn Mashhadi, an *amir* of Qotb al-Din Aibak and *hakim* of Ajmer at the time of Mo'in al-Din's arrival there, whose cousin he later married.¹⁰ Ghawsi (tr., pp. 43-48, 98-99) mentions one other name, Malek Khattāb, apparently belonging to the ruling class as the appellation would suggest, but does not provide any further details about him.

It is not possible to form any definite idea about the non-*morid* circle of his audience, as no information is available in this regard. The latter-day legends regarding his success in converting a very large number of Hindus to Islam as a result of his numerous miracles are historically untenable (Qalandar, p. 219; Ghawsi, tr., p. 43). It is most probably a throwback from the days of Shaikh Nezām al-Din Awliyā' when the Cheshti *selsela* had achieved dazzling heights of popularity and prestige under him. One could guess that sections of Muslim settlers of Ajmer, a majority of whom must have undoubtedly belonged to the immigrant community, would have constituted his lay audience. Coming from the same background and being familiar with the Sufi tradition in the countries of their origin, they must have been naturally drawn to him. Moreover, as Ajmer was surrounded by non-Muslim population, his audience might have included some non-Muslims as well. But authentic information on the point is not available.

His two main disciples, Shaikh Qotb al-Din Bakhtiyār Kāki and Shaikh Hamid al-Din Nagauri lived and worked in altogether different conditions. While Shaikh Qotb al-Din lived and worked in the rising metropolis of Delhi, Shaikh Hamid al-Din lived in the countryside of Rajasthan among the village folk. Besides Shaikh Farid al-Din Mas'ud Ganj-e Shakar, more commonly known as Bābā Farid, only few other names of the disciples of Shaikh Qotb al-Din are available in the sources, and most of them appear to belong to the class of ulema. Shaikh Farid al-Din himself hailed from a family of judges. Two others were serving judges and left the job after becoming disciples (Jamāli, pp. 64-65; Amir Khord, pp. 26-28, 30, 33-34; Fereshta, II, p. 388). As he lived and worked in the capital city of Delhi, it may be presumed that some members of the ruling class also might have come into his close contact and possibly entered his discipleship. But we have only one vague

¹⁰ These include Ziyā' al-Din Balkhi, Ahmad Khādem, Shaikh Fakhr al-Din Ahmad Ajmeri; see Ghawsi (tr. pp. 31, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38); Jamāli (p. 19); the name of Sayyed Hosayn Mashhadi's uncle was Sayyed Wajih al-Din Mashahadi); Nagauri (p. 15) Gholām Sarvar, I, pp. 263-64.

reference in a later source, Ghawsi's *Golzār-e abrār*; to the effect that one of his *morids*, Shaikh Mo'ezz al-Din Dehlavi, had served as deputy (*nāyeb*) of the rulers of Delhi, though this could not be verified from the available historical sources. The office of *nāyeb* was introduced after Sultan Shams al-Din, who died a few months after the death of Shaikh Qotb al-Din in November 1235.¹¹

Siyar al-awliyā' and some other later sources would like us to believe that the entire population of Delhi, including Sultan Shams al-Din Iltutmish and his nobles, had great faith in the Shaikh. But this contention is not supported by other sources such as *Fawā'ed al-fo'ād* and *Khayr al-majāles*. He is reported to have once paid a visit to the court of Sultan Iltutmish regarding the confirmation of the land allegedly held by the children of Khwāja Mo'in al-Din Cheshti (Amir Khord, pp. 63-65). But this event is extremely unlikely to have taken place. Early Cheshtis never accepted land assignment, and therefore Mo'in al-Din's journey from Ajmer to Delhi to secure a decree (*farmān*) for the purpose seems to be highly doubtful. It is also said that when, on the complaint of Shaikh Najm al-Din Soghrā, Mo'in al-Din wanted to take him to Ajmer, the entire population of Delhi along with the sultan came out of the city and followed them, weeping and wailing. Seeing this, Mo'in al-Din asked Najm al-Din to stay at Delhi (Nagauri, pp. 5-16, 27-43). This is also not supported by the hagiological as well as historical sources. It may, however, be argued that at the time Delhi was populated mostly by original and first generation immigrants from Afghanistan, Persia and Central Asia where Sufi traditions were very strong and well established, and Cheshti *selsela* was quite well known. These people might have felt a natural attraction for an eminent Sufi of their own background.

Among the few disciples of Shaikh Hamid al-Din Nagauri mentioned in his *Sorur al-sodur*, two people belonged to the ruling class (referred to as *wakil-e dar* and *malek-e Nagaur*), a few were apparently members of the learned class (ulema) while some others seem to belong to ordinary sections of the society (Nagauri, pp. 3-33, 43, 52, 68; also Ghawsi, pp. 42-48; Fereshhta, II, pp. 344, 401-2; Mohaddeth Dehlavi, pp.7, 59-60; Gholām Sarvar, II, p. 272). Shaikh Hamid al-Din was the first important Cheshti Sufi who was Indian by birth. He lived in a village and earned his livelihood by tilling a piece of land, which must have made a dialogue with the local people easy and natural (Nagauri, p. 7; Amir Khord, p. 166). Presumably his audience also included non-Muslims as well. Most probably it was a consequence of interaction with the non-

¹¹ Shaikh Qotb al-Din died on 14 Rabi I, 633/15 November 1235, Sultan Shams al-Din Iltutmish died a few months later (Amir Khord, pp. 65-66).

Muslim village folk that he renounced eating of meat and became strict vegetarian (Nagauri, pp. 9, 35). The tradition of close contact with the local non-Muslim population appears to have continued in his family. His grandson, Shaikh Farid al-Din, used to make enquiries about his non-Muslim acquaintances and extend his warm greetings to them in his letters to his family members during his stay at Delhi.¹²

We have comparatively more information about the life and work of Shaikh Farid al-Din Mas'ud Ganj-e Shakar (1175-1265) than his predecessors. He could speak to the people in their own tongue as one of them, and this was perhaps one of the reasons for his attracting a much larger number of people than his masters had done (Qalandar, p. 219; Amir Khord, p. 69; Jamāli, pp. 42-43). It would appear that under his stewardship the base of the *selsela* was considerably expanded and people of varied backgrounds came under its influence. Among those of his disciples whose names have come down to us, ulema continued to constitute the majority. The most illustrious of his disciples and one of the greatest mystics of the Indian subcontinent, Shaikh Nezām al-Din Awliyā', belonged to this class.¹³ Among his disciples were a few government servants,¹⁴ a family of prosperous Keramāni merchants who renounced their trade after becoming disciple and led a life of extreme poverty, a student, a soldier and some belonging to the category of common people. These also included slave and a few women among his disciples (Amir Khord, pp. 93, 95, 133, 182, 218-19; Sejzi, pp. 52, 88, 92, 96, 254-66, 344, 405).

He seems to have attracted in his general audience a very large number of people who came to pay their respect to him and benefit from his spiritual powers. After the death of his *pir*, he could not stay at Delhi and Hansi, because too much attention of the people disturbed his

¹² In one of his letters he asks the addressee to make enquiries about the welfare of some one named Mahadev and assure him that he will speak to Khwāja-ye Jahān about his problem. In another letter he asks the addressee to enquire about the welfare of all the Hindu residents of the village. See Farid al-Din, pp. 4a, 6a.

¹³ Besides Shaikh Nezām al-Din, there were a number of eminent scholars among the disciples (*morids*) of Shaikh Farid al-Din Mas'ud, including Jamāl al-Din of Hansi Badr al-Din Eshāq, Shaikh Najib al-Din Motawakkel, Maulana Dā'ud Palhi, etc. (Sejzi, pp. 42, 43, 265, 316-17, 365; Qalandar, p. 118; Mohaddeth Dehlavi, pp. 71, 78, 79, 82, 96-7, 177, 179, 188; Amir Khord, pp. 194-95; Gholām Sarvar, I, pp. 312-13.

¹⁴ In this regard names of Shams Dabir and Khwāja Kamāl al-Din Samarqandi are mentioned. Shams became the secretary (*dabir*) of Balban's son, and, according to Amir Khord (pp. 189, 316). Khwāja Kamāl al-Din's father held vizierate in Khorasan and he was assigned vast territories in the region of Multan, Hansi, Deopalpur and Ajodhan; see also Sejzi, pp. 218-20. Qalandar (pp. 149-50) refers to a Turk Malek of Ajodhan who became a disciple (*morid*) in consequence of a miracle of the Shaikh.'

solitude (Qalandar, p. 188). Even at Ajodhan, which he had chosen for his residence because its population was uncouth and did not care much about mystic ideas, he could not enjoy his solitude for long. Ajodhan was on the caravan route from Delhi to Multan, and many travellers used to drop there to pay their respect. Once the entire army of Sultan Nasir al-Din Mahmud, marching to Uch which included the future Sultan Ghiyāth al-Din Balban went to Ajodhan for the purpose and congested the entire place (Sejzi, pp. 171, 336). It also appears that many people used to come for amulets (*ta'wiz*), sometimes crowding the place. Once Shaikh Nezām al-Din Awliyā' was asked by his master to write amulets, but there were so many seekers that he got tired.¹⁵ While most of the travellers were presumably merchants, the seekers of amulets were most likely common people.

For the first time we hear about the yogis coming to the *Jamā'at-khāna* (hospice) of Shaikh Farid al-Din and staying there. There are reports of some interaction between them and the inmates of the hospice. Qalandars are also reported to have frequented his hospice (Hunter, p. 532, cited in Nizami, 1973, p. 107). Legends attribute conversion of a number of tribes in the Punjab region to him, though Cheshti and historical sources are silent on the point (Zilli, 1986). Moreover, conversion does not seem to have been included among the priorities of the Cheshtis, but tribal members could be legitimately expected to have been among his audience at one point of time or other (Qalandar, p. 130). Shaikh Nezām al-Din, mentioning the large number of people visiting the Shaikh (*az khalq hadd nabud*), remarked that the doors of the hospice, unlike other Sufi centres, could not be closed until around midnight (Barani, pp. 343-44).

The entire situation changed under Nezām al-Din Awliyā'. Not only did the *morid* and non-*morid* followers of the Cheshtis increase enormously, their composition also witnessed great change. On closer examination, certain significant conclusions emerge which are of great interest for the understanding of the sociopolitical role of the Sufis during that period.

In spite of the fact that much more information is available about Shaikh Nezām al-Din and his work, it is not possible to form any precise idea about the numerical strength and the social composition of his disciples. In the light of the available evidence, both hagiological and historical, one is inclined to conclude that the number must have run into

¹⁵ Sejzi (pp. 59-60, 404-5, 417-18) refers to three occasions when Jogis were present at the *Jamā'at-khāna* of Shaikh Farid al-Din. Obviously, all the three occasions relate to the period when Shaikh Nezām al-Din was staying there. It would, therefore, indicate that the Jogis were frequent visitors of the *Jamā'at-khāna*. See also Qalandar, pp. 130-31.

thousands. Ziyā' al-Din Barani speaks about a continuous flow of people to Ghiyāthpur, where Shaikh's hospice was located, to have a glimpse of the Shaikh, receive *barka* (grace) from him and get enrolled as his *morids*. He also registered his surprise regarding the unusually large number of people who became his disciples.¹⁶ According to Ghawsi Shattāri, *khalifas* of the Shaikh counted no less than seven hundred. Mir Khord states that almost the entire royal establishment of Sultan Alā' al-Din was deeply attached to the Shaikh. It would appear from Sejzi's *Fawā'ed al-fo'ād* that many members of the standing royal army stationed at Delhi were attached to him. Moreover, according to Amir Khord, most of the troops stationed at Chanderi were disciples of the Shaikh. Even after making due allowance for the possible element of exaggeration in these assertions, it is clear that a very large number of people became disciples of the Shaikh and consequently formed his audience.

Out of this vast number of followers of the Shaikh, names of only a small number of them have been preserved. In most of the cases the information is very sketchy. Even the compilers of the biographical dictionaries generally do not provide some information regarding these aspects. Any study of the nature and composition of Nezām al-Din's disciples and the audience in general is, therefore, beset with serious limitations and would remain tentative at best.

Fawā'ed al-fo'ād, our main source on the subject, contains only 23 names of his *morids*, and this list does not include the names of even some very prominent members of the circle of his disciples.¹⁷ As noted earlier, even the eminent poet and disciple Amir Khosrow Dehlavi is mentioned only indirectly (p. 142). It is therefore not surprising that out of the vast number of his disciples, names of only about 150 could be located from a large number of sources. Moreover, changes of far-reaching significance in the social structure, set in motion as a result of the Ghorian conquest, had by now come to fruition. A number of factors, among which accessibility of education to almost all sections of the

¹⁶ *Hasrat-nāma*, which contained a long response of Shaikh Nezām al-Din to Barani's reservations on this point, is lost, but this particular excerpt has been preserved by Mir Khord (pp. 356-59); cf. Nizami, 1991, pp. 52-55.

¹⁷ Among the well known disciples names of only the following occur in the course of entire book: Hosām al-Din Paili (p. 18), Hosām al-Din Hājji (p. 18), Shaikh Othmān Siwistāni (p. 28), Borhān al-Din Gharib (p. 24), Mahmud Awadhi (Shaikh Nāser al-Din Mahmud Cherāgh-i Dilli, p. 73), Khwāja Nuh (p. 151), Muhi al din Kāshāni (p. 168) and Serāj al-Din Hāfez (p. 289). It is also interesting to note that none of them finds a mention more than once. Such prominent disciples as Shams al-Din Yahyā, Fakhr al-Din Zarrādi, Shaikh Qotb al-Din Monawwar, Wajih al-Din Yusof, Wajih al-Din Nili, and Fasih al-Din are not mentioned at all.

society was perhaps the most important, facilitated rapid upward social mobility of hitherto largely unprivileged classes (Siddiqi, pp. 22-48). Barani, a staunch supporter of the old order, bitterly laments the rise of those whom he considers to be low-born to the positions of eminence and authority. He makes a very strong plea in his *Fatwā-ye jahāndāri* (p. 49) that the children of lower social strata should not be imparted education, as it will make them efficient and capable. In this situation, the title or post held by a person could no more be taken as an indicator of his social background. It, however, provides a clue to the present status of the holder of that title or post, and that is all that we can hope for at the present.

The following main categories of the social grouping emerge from the available evidence:

1. The imperial household, members of the nobility and the government servants.
2. Ulema and the learned.
3. Those attached to some profession.
4. Women.
5. Slaves.
6. Common people.

Members of the imperial household, the nobility and the government servants constituted around 15 per cent of the total recorded number of Shaikh's disciples, an unprecedented phenomenon in the history of the Cheshti *selsela* and the more surprising in view of long Cheshti tradition of aversion to the ruling class.¹⁸

It would appear that 'Alā' al-Din's policies, necessitated by political and administrative compulsions and aimed at curbing sedition and weeding out corruption from public life, tended to create a very favourable atmosphere for the expansion of Sufic tendencies among the people. His strict regulations and harsh punishments made indulgence in vice and corruption almost impossible. Barani attributes the general atmosphere of piety during 'Alā' al-Din's reign as also the other great achievements of the period to the grace of Shaikh's personality. But almost in the same breath he says that 'Alā' al-Din's death signalled a general slackness in public morals and laments that under the influence of Qotb al-Din

¹⁸ For their names, which include that of the heir apparent, see Qalandar, p. 69; Mohammad Jamāl Qewām al-Din, pp. 163-64, cited in Nizami, 1991, pp. 107-08; Barani, pp. 345, 394, 531-32; Shams Serāj 'Afif, pp. 69, 77; Behāmad Khāni, fols. 137 f., 148a; Amir Khord, pp. 144, 318, 322-23, 350, 523-24, 537; Fereshta, I, p. 128. According to Fereshta, Malek Nosrat was a sister's son of Sultan 'Alā' al-Din.

Mobārak Khalji the population of Delhi headlong plunged in vice and corruption (Barani, pp. 324-25, 332, 343-44, 384, 87).

'Alā' al-Din held Shaikh Nezām al-Din Awliyā' in great respect. Shaikh's status during his reign was almost that of the patron saint of the regime. In an extraordinary gesture of the devotion of the ruling family towards the Shaikh and also, perhaps as a symbol of state's policy towards the order represented by the Shaikh, Khezr Khan, the eldest son and heir designate of the Sultan, became a disciple of the Shaikh, and so did Prince Shādi Khan. The political significance of this act can hardly be emphasized. The nobility, as usual, seems to have taken note of this development and many of them got themselves enrolled as *morids* of the Shaikh. This created a general atmosphere of popularity and acceptance for the Cheshti Order in the capital. There seems to be little doubt that the enormous popularity and following attained by the Cheshti Order under the stewardship of the Shaikh was, at least partly, due to the political patronage of 'Alā' al-Din's regime. One definite advantage that came the way of the Cheshtis as a result of special relationship with 'Alā' al-Din and the consequent political patronage was immunity from opposition. It would appear that there was considerable opposition to the Cheshtis in certain quarters of Delhi, especially among the *ulema*. But the political patronage of the ruling household seems to have acted as a deterrent for the opponents to let them live in peace. Amir Khord has openly acknowledged this fact (Qewām al-Din, pp. 163-64; Barani, pp. 379, 381, 394; Sejzi, pp. 163-64, 166, 407, 418; Qalandar, p. 202; Amir Khord, pp. 93, 144, 156-57, 530, 537).

'Alā' al-Din's death brought about a drastic change in the situation. Shaikh's disciples continued to hold important positions in the central administration under the succeeding regime as earlier, but, mainly due to the fact that the ousted heir apparent, Khezr Khan, was a disciple of the Shaikh, the political patronage was withdrawn, and it seems to have made a great difference to the fortunes of the Cheshtis in Delhi. It also adversely affected the spread of the Cheshti Order and arrested its growth. Fresh recruitment of disciples from the ruling class almost totally stopped. Shaikh Nāser al-Din's complaint of hard times and erosion of the Sufi influence, at a time when, according to the travellers' accounts, a large number of *khānqāhs* were flourishing in Delhi, may best be understood in this background.¹⁹

The largest group among the disciples of the Shaikh, however, came from the class of the *ulema* and the educated people. They constituted more than 50 per cent of the recorded number of his disciples. The

¹⁹ Barani, pp. 394-96; Qalandar, pp. 88, 240; cf. 'Omari, tr., p. 36.

educated people normally joined government service, but among the ulema there were many who devoted their lives to the cause of the furtherance of learning and dissemination of knowledge. Apparently, this class was not always very well off as would appear from the examples of Shaikh Nezām al-Din Awliyā' and his teacher, 'Alā' al-Din Osuli (Amir Khord, pp. 123, 429; Qalandar, p. 190).

It is not very clear as to what occupations these scholars turned mystics pursued for earning their livelihood. Apparently, for most of them Sufism was a full time occupation, while others pursued some profession to earn their bread. For example, Fakhr al-Din Maruzi used to copy the Koran for his livelihood and Yamini Khattāt, Rokn al-Din Chighmar and Shaikh 'Aziz al-Din Sufi were calligraphers of some excellence. Fasih al-Din used to teach children but abandoned it after becoming a disciple of Shaikh Nezām al-Din Awliyā' A majority of them, however, seem to have depended on donations (*fotuh*) for their subsistence (Qalandar, p. 88; Amir Khord, pp. 212, 308-9, 327).

Among the recorded names only few belong to business and artisan background. They constitute around 4 per cent of the recorded strength. The majority of them abandoned their ancestral professions after becoming disciples of the Shaikh. Shaikh Nāser al-Din did not pursue the lucrative trade of the woollen garments that he had inherited from his father. Shams al-Din Bazzāz was a prosperous merchant but discontinued his business after becoming the disciple of the Shaikh and led a life of extreme poverty.²⁰

There is no clue to decide the social background of a number of disciples. Most probably they were common people without any particular claim to distinction. Few women are also mentioned among his *morids*. A new convert whose brother was still a Hindu and some slaves too are reported to have been enrolled as disciples (Sejzi, pp. 5, 35, 192-93, 263, 296-97, 305; Qalandar, p. 134; Amir Khord, p. 324; Ghawsi, tr., p. 18).

At the zenith of his popularity the general circle of Shaikh's audience was very large indeed. People representing almost every section of the society from the members of the ruling family, mighty nobles and highest government officials rubbed shoulders with the poorest of the poor. Sometimes so many people came that there was no room for them to sit and they had to sit in the open exposed to the sun. A continuous stream of people used to flow to Ghiyāthpur. For the convenience of the

²⁰ Qalandar, pp. 146-47; Amir Khord, p. 248, who also (p.154) refers to one Abu Bakr Warrāq among the disciples of the Shaikh. The appellation of Warrāq would suggest that he was probably associated with the profession of book making.

visitors of the Shaikh, people had set up resting places on the way with arrangements of water for purposes of drinking as well as making ablution, and prayers could also be offered there (Sejzi, pp. 158, 305, 377; Qalandar, pp. 184-86, 257; Amir Khord, pp. 356-59; Barani, pp. 343-44). Usually, certain timings were observed in the Sufi hospices to give the master some respite for rest, mediation and devotions. But no particular timings seem to have been in force at the *Jamā'at-khāna* of the Shaikh and people could come almost any time of the day to receive *baraka* and blessings of the Shaikh. Many came with some problem and it was always Shaikh's endeavour to satisfy their needs. It is reported that the daily expenditure of his kitchen was two thousand *tankas* excluding the cost of cereals, which must have meant a fortune in those days (Sejzi, pp. 169, 305-6; Qalandar, pp. 87-88, 105-6; Jamāli, p. 101; Fereshta, II, p. 295). This gives an idea about the magnitude of the number of those who came to visit the *Jamā'at-khāna* every day. It is, however, surprising that except for solitary evidence contained in the *Fawā'd al-fo'ād* about a disciple bringing his Hindu brother, there is no mention of Hindus visiting the *Jamā'at-khāna*. It is interesting to note that the Shaikh did not accede to the request of the disciple to pray for the conversion of his brother. This clearly shows the attitude of the Cheshtis towards conversion.²¹

Shaikh Nāser al-Din took the stewardship of the Cheshti Order at Delhi at a time when the special relationship between the *Jamā'at-khāna* and the court had come to an end. This brought about a drastic change in the situation. Political patronage was already withdrawn and, as a result, fresh recruitment of the disciples from the ruling class had almost completely stopped. This affected the material well being of the *Jamā'at-khāna*. Consequently, the composition of his audience had also undergone a change. There is hardly any reference in the *Khayr al-majāles* to the visit of any important member of the ruling class to the *Jamā'at-khāna*.²² Most of the disciples hailed from the class of the ulema and the

²¹ There are only two occasions when a member of the ruling class is reported to have paid a visit to the *Jamā'at-khāna* of the Shaikh. See Qalandar, pp. 11, 217. At another occasion (p. 86) a Malek is reported to have sent a gift. Gesu Darāz refers to one Malek Sadr al-Din, *nāyeb-e ra'is* as a *morid* of the Shaikh. See Hosayni, p. 20.

²² These included, among others, Qāzi 'Abd al-Moqtader Thanesari, Sayyed Mohammad Gesu Darāz, Khwājagi, Shams al-Din Jazri, Kamāl al-Din, Zayn al-Din, Qāzi Adam, Sayyed Mohammad b. Ja'far Makki, Sayyed Jalāl al-Din Makhdum-e Jahāniyān. See Qalandar, pp. 66, 105, 200, 205, 217, 326-27; Amir Khord, pp. 252-54, 371; Ghawsi, tr., pp. 112-14, 139, 234, 271, 492; Mohaddeth Dehlavi, pp. 160, 165-66, 168, 173; Gholām Sarvar, II, pp. 353, 357, 366, 381, 402.

learned.²³ Mention is also made of a clerk and a chief of the jewellers. Quite a few women, many from Sehāli, were also included among his disciples. There were still many others who apparently belonged to the category of common people. It would seem that he attracted disciples from a wide area. Sehāli, Zafarābād, Sāmāna, Bihār and Kanehar are included among the places from where his *morids* came.²⁴

The presence of scholars (*dāneshmand*) and students (*mota' allem*) was distinctly more pronounced in assemblies than in the days of his master, Nezām al-Din Awliyā'. Hamid Qalandar often observes that it was an assembly of distinguished scholars (*dāneshmandan-e bozorg*), scholars particularly renowned for their debating skills (*dānishmandān-e bahhāth*), or that it was an assembly of ulema and judges. As a result, the discussions in the assemblies turned more and more to academic issues. The students were found asking questions, seeking further elucidation on certain points. Consequently, we find sometimes very complex and finer issues related to Sufism as well as those of general academic interest being delved in greater detail than was generally done at the assemblies of his master. This was probably due to Shaikh Nāser al-Din's greater personal touch in how he related to those who came to visit him. Hamid Qalandar occasionally makes a general reference to the newcomers in the assemblies of Shaikh Nāser al-Din which is not the case with Hasan Sejzi, who very rarely pays any attention to the details of this nature. It was apparently a habit with Shaikh Nāser al-Din to make polite enquiries particularly from the newcomers; asking where they hailed from, what their profession was etc., which made the newcomers more at ease and comfortable and a kind of instant personal rapport was established. This must have made the communication with his audience much easier and effective. He showed particular concern for those with some handicap or problems.

Qalandars and Jawāliq continued to visit the Cheshti hospice as they had done during the days of Shaikh Nezām al-Din Awliyā'. His solicitude for them seems to have been well known. It was perhaps because of this that Qalandar Torāb, who assaulted the Shaikh and grievously injured him, could find access to him without any hindrance. There is, however, no mention of Hindus visiting the *Jamā'at-khāna* of the Shaikh.²⁵

²³ Qalandar, pp. 94-95, 134, 143. According to Qalandar (p. 107), most of the men and women of Sehāli were attached to the Shaikh as disciples. In the opinion of the Shaikh, the women of that place were more pious than the men.

²⁴ Qalandar, pp. 60, 63-64, 151-56, 210, 273. According to Behāmad Khāni (fol. 151b), it would require a book to record the names of all Shaikh Nāser al-Din's disciples.

²⁵ Qalandar (*Supplement*), p. 286: Hosayni, p.91. Also see *Life and Times of Shaikh Nasir ud Din*, pp. 63-64 (This is not included among the references).

Obviously, besides the eminence and charisma of the individual Sufis, some other considerations and factors also played a role in determining the nature and extent of their outreach among different sections of the society. These included, among other things, the sociopolitical conditions obtaining at a particular point of time and the kind of relationship the individual Sufis had with the political authority. If the political authority was sympathetic towards a Sufi master, the chances of the penetration of his influence were substantially greater than under a ruler who was indifferent. But if the ruler happened to be hostile, the prospects of the growth of the clientele were definitely affected.

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