

Analyzing the spread of Sufi Islam in Delhi: The role played by the disciplines of Shaikh Nizam ad-din Auliya

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Abstract: The disciples of Shaikh Nizam ad-din Auliya played an important role in spreading Sufi Islam in the city of Delhi. Officially, the Shaikh appointed Nasir ad-din Chiragh i-Dehli as his Khalifa but there were many other disciples of the Shaikh who played an equally prominent role in spreading his message among the people. This paper analyzes the role of his disciples in great detail.

Key Words: Sufi, Delhi, Shaikh, Dargah, Islam, Sufism, Khalifa, Disciple.

1. INTRODUCTION:

The message of Shaikh Nizam ad-din Auliya was preached by his disciples—Shaikh Nasir ad-din Mahmud Chiragh i-Dehli, Maulana Shams ad-din Yahya, Shaikh Qutub ad-din Munawwar, Maulana Hisam ad-din Multani, Maulana Fakhr ad-din Zaradi, Maulana Ala ad-din Nili, Maulana Vazi ad-din Yusuf, Maulana Siraj ad-din Usma, Maulana Shihab ad-din Imam, Shaikh Burhan ad-din Gharib, Qazi Muin ad-din Kashani, and Khwaja Muhammad Imam. Some of the Shaikh's disciples carried forward his spiritual legacy outside Delhi, however, there were some who lived, preached and worked for the betterment of people in the city.

There were others who were guided by the Shaikh to preach the Sufi message in other parts of the country, but they returned to Delhi and were buried in the same compound as their master. The fact that so many divine men were buried in the same compound made it a spiritual oasis which became a centre of religious piety and spiritual salvation for the people of the city as well as for those who came from lands afar to visit the city. The *Siyar al-Auliya* provides a detailed account of the disciples of the Shaikh who lie buried in the same compound.

2. THE PROMINENT DISCIPLES

One of the disciples of the Shaikh who lies buried close to the grave of his master was Khwaja Taqi ad-din Nuh. Shaikh Nizam ad-din Auliya held him in very high esteem and had once told his compatriots—“Hold him dear! He is very virtuous. He is the memorizer of the Quran and finishes the Quran every Friday night and has much attachment with its recitation and has also acquired much learning. He has nothing to do with anything, be it an enemy or a friend.”¹ Another of his disciples who lies buried close to him is Maulana Fakhr ad-din Mazoori who was known for his qualities of abstinence and piety. The *Siyar al-Auliya* mentions him as one of the earliest disciples of the Shaikh who began to reside in the presence of his master towards the end of his life and settled in Ghiyaspur.² He was buried in the same compound as his master.

The most outstanding disciple of the Shaikh who was a poet and scholar par excellence was Hazrat Amir Khusrau. In his capacity as a court poet, he served many Sultans and wrote panegyrics to them and their exploits. He was a master of *ghazal*, *mathanawi*, *qasida*, and *rubai*, and was equally proficient in prose. According to Mohammad Habib, “he wrote *qasidas* and *ghazals* with the same rapidity as our modern journalists write their daily editorials.”³ He was not a *khalifa* of the Shaikh but such was the affection between him and his master, that he was treasured by the latter as the jewel in his crown. On more than one occasion, Amir Khusrau served as an intermediary between the master and his other disciples. The *Siyar al-Auliya* bears testimony to this—“Amir Khusrau enjoyed extreme nearness with the *Sultan al-Mashaikh* (Nizam ad-din Auliya) and he had a special place with him.

He could go to him whenever he liked and advice was sought from him in all the affairs. If any of the exalted friends had to submit something, he asked Amir Khusrau so that he could place their supplications before their master.”⁴

¹Khwurd, Amir, *Siyar al-Auliya*, translated by Ishrat Hussain Ansari and Hamid Afaq Qureshi, Idarah i-Adabiyat i-Dilli, Delhi, 2013, pp. 151-152

²Ibid, 227

³Nizami, K.A. (ed.), *Politics and Society during the Early Medieval Period*, Collected Works of Professor Mohammad Habib, New Delhi, 1974, p. 296

⁴Khwurd, Amir, 2013, Op cit, p. 230

However, it is important to note that during the early years of his career, Khusrau was away from Delhi for the most part, and it was only during the reign of Sultan Jalal ad-din that the bond between the Shaikh and the poet grew to a great extent.⁵ Amir Khusrau lies buried in the same compound as his master, and as a tradition dictated by the Shaikh, the grave of Amir Khusrau is visited first by the followers upon entering the dargah compound.

Another saint to have been buried close to his master in the dargah compound of Shaikh Nizam ad-din Auliya was Shaikh Mubarak Gopamawi, popularly known as Amir Dad. The *Siyar al-Auliya* provides a detailed exposition of his virtues—“He was a pure gnostic and was famous for his generosity, sacrifice and selflessness.”⁶ He was among his first disciples. He was buried close to his master at the edge of the *makbarah* of Shaikh Nizam ad-din Auliya.⁷ Yet another disciple of the Shaikh who lies buried in the same compound was Khwaja Taj ad-din Dadri. After his demise, he was brought to the compound and was buried there.⁸ Khwaja Moyad ad-din Ansari was another of the Shaikh’s disciples to have been buried in the same compound.

2. NASIR AD-DIN CHIRAGH I-DEHLI: THE KHALIFA OF SHAIKH NIZAM AD-DIN AULIYA:

Among all his disciples, the most prominent disciple of Shaikh Nizam ad-din Auliya was Shaikh Nasir ad-din Mahmud Chiragh i-Dehli (1276/77-1356 AD) who became his chief *khalifa* and succeeded him. Abul Fazl mentions that his birthplace was Delhi, and he was the disciple and vicegerent of Shaikh Nizam ad-din Auliya.⁹ He carried forward the Sufi movement in Delhi till his death. He was personally inclined to asceticism and self-mortification, but his spiritual master charted a different course for him. On the advice of his master, he agreed to remain in Delhi and work for the spiritual upliftment of the people. Shaikh Nasir ad-din took up government service and got embroiled in the politics of the imperial court, so much so that Badauni credited him for having installed Firoz Shah Tughlaq on the throne of Delhi.¹⁰ His *jamaat khana* was crowded with every kind of visitor from morning to night. Shaikh Nasir ad-din had no material favours to bestow but his *jamaat khana* was a place of refuge for all.¹¹

The teachings of the Shaikh, contained in the malfuz *Khair al-Majalis*, were compiled by his disciple Hamid Qalandar who followed the same pattern for recording the conversations as his predecessor, Amir Hasan Sijzi. An analysis of the *Khair al-Majalis* reveals that, like his master, the Shaikh too had a preference for the basic tenets of the faith and did not renounce the *Shariah*. In one of the passages of the text, the Shaikh criticizes those who call themselves Auliya but do not perform the obligatory prayers. According to the Shaikh “Such a group has not remained to be the leaders as the due concession to the *Shariat* is obligatory for leading.”¹² In another paragraph of the text, the Shaikh emphasizes the need to strictly observe the timings of the *namaz*.¹³

The Shaikh had a large number of disciples but he did not appoint anyone as his *khalifa* and the *khirqah* given to him by his master was buried with him after his death. The objective behind the Shaikh’s resistance to appoint his successor can be interpreted in many ways. One logical conclusion can be that he did not consider any of his disciples worthy enough of carrying on the Sufi mantle.

He probably did not want to grant his *wilayat* to someone who was not worthy. Spiritual teachers were faced with the problem of appointing their successors and Shaikh Nasir ad-din Chiragh i-Dehli was no exception. Zia ad-din Barani in the *Hasrat Nama* explains Shaikh Nizam ad-din Auliya’s dilemma in selecting a spiritual successor—“It occurred in my heart that the great spiritual guides acted with great caution in making disciples.”¹⁴ If making disciples was difficult, the task of selecting a spiritual successor would have been extremely arduous. The Shaikh, therefore, decided not to appoint anyone as his *khalifa*. The Shaikh exercised great influence on people during his lifetime, and even after his union with God. The village in which he was buried came to be known as Chiragh i-Dehli.

3. DECLINE OF SUFISM IN DELHI AND ITS APPEARANCE IN THE DECCAN

The 14th century witnessed a decline as far as Chishti Sufi activity in Delhi was concerned. Many reasons have been ascribed for this. The decision of Sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq to shift the capital from Delhi to Deogir (later known as Daulatabad) in the Deccan has been considered one of the major reasons. However, there is no reason to believe that Delhi ceased to be an important political centre. The newly formed capital only served as a second capital and not the only capital of the empire. Delhi remained important for political, economic, social, and cultural reasons.

⁵Nizami, K.A. (ed.), 1974, Op cit, p. 312

⁶Khwurd, Amir, Ibid, p. 237

⁷Ibid, p. 238

⁸Ibid, p. 239

⁹Fazl, Abul, *Ain i-Akbari*, vol. III, translated by Col. H.S. Jarrett, Oriental Books Reprint Corporation, New Delhi, 1978, p. 409

¹⁰Badauni, Mullah Abd al-Qadir, *Muntakhab ut-Tawarikh*, vol. I, Calcutta, 1868, p. 242

¹¹Nizami, K.A. (ed.), 1974, Op cit, p. 373

¹²Qalandar, Hamid, *Khair al-Majalis*, translated by Ishrat Hussain Ansari and Hamid Afaq Siddiqui, Idarah i-Adabiyat i-Dilli, Delhi, 2010, p. 21

¹³Ibid, p. 26

¹⁴Khwurd, Amir, 2013, Op cit, p. 270

Some scholars have attributed the dominant position of the ulema under Sultan Firoz as one of the major reasons for the decline of mysticism, while others have explained the causes of decline of the Chishti *silsilah* in economic terms vis-à-vis the high rate of inflation and the subsequent socio-economic chaos in the city of Delhi. According to Shaikh Abd al-Haqq Muhaddith Dehlvi, all these factors led to religious and moral degeneration.¹⁵ This was a period of social chaos, which was reflected in intellectual anarchy which gravely affected mysticism.¹⁶

In this phase, mysticism lost its spiritual content and many historical works including the *Futuh al-Firoz Shahi* have referred to these trends. The text mentions that 'on sacred days large parties of women came out of the city riding palanquins, chariots and *dolahs* on horses and male buffaloes, and numerous big groups of these came out on foot and visited tombs. Libertines and dissolute persons who are slaves to the desires of the flesh and had no scruples, created mischief and rowdiness which was an obvious result of this practice.'¹⁷ All this affected the organization of the Chishti *silsilah* in Delhi. The *silsilah* was destabilized and Delhi lost its central position in the Chishti mystic organization.

Some scholars have ascribed the decline of Sufism in Delhi to the destruction caused by Timur in 1398 AD. As a result of this, the Chishti order was dispersed to all parts of India. The consequent impact of Timur's invasion on the Chishti *silsilah* can be gauged by the provincialisation of the *silsilah* following the assault of Timur. Prominent Sufis spread into regional centres and made them their base. K.A. Nizami has shown that this period of decline was eventually followed by a renaissance of the order in the 17th and 18th centuries.

The onus of shifting base from Delhi to Daulatabad fell only on the Muslim elites, including the Sufis and the ulema. In this case also, everyone from the elite or learned class did not migrate. There was no *en masse* migration. However, many Sufis did migrate to the Deccan and went on to other urban centres in the Deccan. They helped in consolidating the Islamic intellectual tradition in the South. When the Sultan ordered a shift of base back to Delhi, only some Sufis returned, most of them stayed back and established firm roots in the south, tending the graves of those who died. Therefore, it can be assumed that the shift of Chishti activity to the Deccan was more of a choice exercised by the Sufis who migrated from Delhi than a politically motivated design.

The decline of the Chishti *silsilah* in Delhi, however, did not result in its decline in other parts of the country. One disciple of Nizam ad-din Auliya who established a popular Sufi centre in the Deccan was saint Burhan al-din Gharib. His centre of activity was Khuldabad. Another prominent saint of the Deccan was the *khalifa* of Shaikh Nasir ad-din Chiragh i-Dehli—Gezu Deraz. He was the most prominent *khalifa* of Shaikh Nasir ad-din, and helped in spreading his master's teachings in the Deccan. He lies buried in Gulbarga. The Chishti mystic tradition which was introduced in the South by Shaikh Burhan al-din Gharib was crystallized into a movement by Gezu Deraz. Abul Fazl claims that it was on the advice of his master that Gezu Deraz went to the Deccan 'where he was received with honour by the high and low.'¹⁸

4. CONCLUSION:

To conclude, it may be reiterated that the disciples of Shaikh Nizam ad-din Auliya played an important role in popularizing Islamic mysticism in the city of Delhi. The most prominent among his disciples was his khalifa, Shaikh Nasir ad-din Chiragh i-Dehli. However, all the other disciples were equally proficient in the area of mysticism. A careful analysis of sources reveals that Delhi remained a prominent centre of Sufism till the 14th century, after which it showed signs of decline due to political reasons. However, the practices of Sufi Islam were continued by the disciples of Shaikh Nizam ad-din Auliya in the Deccan.

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¹⁵cf Siddiqui, Sameena Hasan, *Aura and the Institution: A Chishti Dargah*, Gateway Publishing, Delhi, 2008, p. 19

¹⁶Ibid, p. 19

¹⁷Ibid, p. 19

¹⁸Fazl, Abul, *Ain i-Akbari*, translated by Col. H.S. Jarrett, vol. III, Oriental Books Reprint Corporation, New Delhi, 1978, p. 414