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MEDIATIONAL ROLE OF THE SUFIS IN THE ISLAMICATE SOUTH ASIA: A CONCEPTUAL AND EMPIRICAL STUDY

Mediation refers to an intervention between the state or political authorities and the people, as well as invention among varied social groups in order to mitigate or resolve differences, and thus avert possible conflicts among them. In premodern polities, Sufism and its institutions provided a mediating space to the people. The sufis in premodern South Asia played a mediational role vis-à-vis the state as well as the society. The sufi shaykhs influenced the state policies in favour of the people by affecting the behavior of the rulers towards other political and social groups. Some of them associated with the rulers for mediating between the rulers and the ruled, and successfully used their influence for redressing the grievances of the aggrieved. Some of the sufis avoided the company of the kings and nobles, but performed the mediational role in their own way by indirectly mediating among the conflicting social and political groups.

As a term, mediation refers to intervention between two or more contending groups or entities. Quite often, mediation is perceived as an intervention between the state or political authorities and the people, but it may also refer to invention among varied social groups. So the concept of mediation is understood with reference to both the state and society. As a systematic concept, mediation is generally referred to as an informal method of alternative dispute resolution. It is a way of resolving disputes and settling disagreements between two or more contending parties with the help of an independent person who acts as a neutral entity or a mediator.

The history of Sufism reveals that such a mediational role was effectively played by the sufis in varied political and socio-cultural settings, since Sufism and its institutions provided a mediating space in premodern polities. The premodern sufis performed the meditational role vis-à-vis the state as well as the society. The present paper is an attempt to conceptualize the meditational role of the sufis in the Islamicate South Asia,[1] wherein they provided an institutional space for mediating between the rulers and the ruled, as well as among varied social groups. This study is an attempt to go beyond the archetypal typologies of resistance to or collaboration with the state or political authorities, as generally undertaken in studies on Sufism and its political dimension. Instead, it tries to search for a more meaningful interaction of the sufis with the state and society through a conceptual and empirical study of the subject. Though a plethora of empirical evidence can be cited to establish the mediational role of the sufis in the Islamicate South Asia, only limited empirical citations have been attempted in the present paper. Thus, the present study does not intend to be exhaustive in nature. For the purpose of narrowing down the scope of the present study, empirical evidence dealing with the role and activities of the sufis of the Suhrawardi and Chishti *Silsilah*s has exclusively been cited, though the sufis belonging to other *silsilah*s (initiatic lineages or spiritual pedigrees) such as the Naqshbandiyya, Qadiriyya and Shattariyya, etc. also successfully mediated at political and societal levels. It is important to bear in mind that the Suhrawardi and Chishti *Silsilah*s were the two earliest sufi *Silsilah*s to be introduced in the Islamicate South Asia, and they still continue to flourish in various parts of modern South Asia and beyond.

1. Conceptualizing the Mediational Role of the Sufis at the State Level

Many scholars of Sufism have focused on its political dimension while studying the state-sufi relationship.[2] Some of these studies tend to employ archetypal typologies of resistance to or collaboration with the state or political authorities. Nonetheless, there is a need to go beyond these conventional categories, and search for more meaningful ways and means of

the state-sufi interaction. In this regard, the concept of civil society, and particularly its meditational model, may help conceptualize the relationship of the sufis with the rulers as well as the common people. The sufis and their institutions can be interpreted as one of the many expressions of civil society in premodern polities. Though apparently it seems anachronistic to identify the manifestations of a modern phenomenon in premodern times, it may be argued that the conceptual roots of the idea of civil society go back to the premodern past.[3] Moreover, a few empirical studies have also tried to locate the expressions of civil society in premodern or medieval European history as well.[4]

It is further argued that the concept of civil society may be of European origin, but most of its important features were also found in Muslim polities. Hasan Hanafi, for instance, contends that Muslim civil society is differentiated, involving many organizations and institutions. The varied modes of civil society range from the concept of *umma* (which Hanafi defines as a nation without boundaries) to the institutions of '*ulama*', judges, *awqāf*, sufi groups and the like. Historically speaking, these institutions played roles similar to those identified with civil society.[5] In addition, the dogmatic assertion among the Euro-American scholars regarding the complete absence of civil society in Muslim polities is misleading and needs to be rectified.[6] Among others, the sufi institutions may be viewed as one of the manifestations of civil society in premodern Muslim polities.

Civil society theorists have developed state-civil society relational models, which can broadly be classified into four types: (i) confrontational model of civil society; (ii) autonomous model of civil society; (3) collaborative/associational model of civil society; and (4) mediational model of civil society.[7] The mediational model of state-civil society relationship views civil society as an intermediate institutional space or a mediating sphere between an individual and a state. The role of the sufis in premodern South Asian society, as elsewhere in the Islamicate world, can be interpreted within the framework of meditational

model of civil society, as the sufis often mediated between the common people, who had no access to those in power, and the political authorities, as well as among the conflicting social groups. Since many of the kings and the high state officials held the sufis in high esteem, so through direct or indirect intervention, the sufis got the grievances of the people redressed by the monarchs and/or the incumbents of high political offices, many of whom were their disciples or devotees.

According to the idea of civil society as a mediating sphere, any collaboration or association with the state in a formal institutional sense is not a pre-requisite for the performance of mediational functions by civil society actors. However, the sufis who cherished cordial relations with the rulers and the ruling elite were in a better position to mediate between the common people and the political authorities, since friendly terms with the rulers greatly facilitated the performance of mediational functions.

According to the mediational model, civil society serves as a buffer zone where state and society interact in order to protect the interests or values of its members and also influence the state. This mediation assumes that there is either an autonomous access of some societal actors to the state or its elite, so that they could influence the state, or it is the other way round, i.e. the ruling elite approach the leading members of the civil society, or both. Though Kamali assumes the autonomous access of some societal actors to the state or its elite as a necessary precondition for civil society,[8] the possibility of the state actors approaching the civil society cannot be ruled out. The history of Sufism in the Islamicate South Asia, as elsewhere in the Islamicate world, shows that some of the sufi shaykhs used to freely approach the kings and the rulers, and in some cases the rulers themselves tried to get access to the sufi *khānqāh*s (sufi dwellings) for various purposes ranging from devotional to political. To sum up, many of the sufis had cordial relationship with their contemporary rulers, and the sufis tried to influence the state policies in favour of the common people, and redress their grievances from those in state positions as well.

2. Conceptualizing the Mediational Role of the Sufis at the Societal Level

The mediational role of any individual, entity, group or an organization is generally perceived in terms of intervention between the state or rulers and the masses. However, mediation may also be understood as an intervention aimed at mediating among varied conflicting social groups. In addition to the mediational role of the sufis in context of state and political authorities, the sufis' acts of mediation among various social groups can also be discerned, whereby they tried to resolve the conflicts among conflicting groups of people in the society.

The sufi goal of 'bringing comforts to hearts' impelled them to combine intense worship of God with the ideal of service of humanity. The sufis considered fulfillment of the needs of the helpless as the highest form of devotion and obedience to God, and often considered it better than many acts of worship to God. They performed or delivered various kinds of social services to the people. In this regard, their *khānqāh*s played an important role, which projected various cities and towns where these *khānqāh*s existed on the map of the sacred geography of South Asian Islam. Nonetheless, seen from this perspective, the social role of the sufis is generally perceived as that of merely delivering social services ranging from spiritual and religious to social, economic, cultural and psychological to the people, particularly the poor and the needy. Here again one needs to go beyond the conventional categories of studying the role which sufis played in the premodern societies, and examine the ways in which the sufis tried to mitigate differences or resolve conflicts at societal level.

3. Mediational Role of the Sufis in the Islamicate South Asia: An Empirical Investigation

In case of the sufis in the Islamicate South Asia, the mediation between the state/rulers and the people sometimes presupposes some degree of cordiality between the rulers and the sufis. The sufis were generally not themselves accessing the royal court or the rulers, rather in most cases it was the kings, princes, provincial governors, or local rulers who sought their company and invited the sufi shaykhs to the court or visited them

in their *khānqāh*s. The members of nobility or the *umarā*' and the high state officials often visited the *khānqāh*s to seek the blessings of the sufi shaykhs as humble devotees and disciples, rather than in their official capacity.

The mediation between the state and the people by the sufis was meant to alleviate the sufferings of the people by extending whatever possible help the sufis could. Service of humanity was one of the principal doctrines of Sufism and Khwajah Mu'in al-Din of Ajmer (d. 1236), the founder of Chishti *Silsilah* in India, considered redressing the misery of those in distress and fulfilling the needs of the helpless as the highest form of obedience to God.[9] In those days, many of the miseries were the result of the oppression of the state officials. The sufis tried to mitigate the sufferings of the people by redressing their grievances. In some cases, they even went to the extent of approaching the state officials for grievance redressal. Through these meetings, the sufis used their influence to protect the interests of the common people. The sufis not only mediated between the state and society, they often mediated between God and the people--the commoners and the kings alike--through their prayers.[10]

Historically speaking, there existed a kind of symbiotic relationship between the state and some of the individual sufis or sufi groups. Often in a discreet manner, these sufis used their association with the political authorities as a tool of influencing the behaviour of the rulers, the *umarā*' and the high state officials. In some cases, these sufis influenced the decision-making processes of the state, and the sufi influence is clearly discernible in the state policies in some cases. The state and the political authorities, on the other hand, benefited from the social acclaim of the sufis in order to overcome their political problems and extend the legitimacy of their rule among the public.

The phenomenon of mediation between the common people and the political authorities by the sufis was not confined to South Asia alone. It existed almost everywhere in the Islamicate world. Regarding the Middle East, for instance,

Lapidus argues that between the fourteenth and nineteenth centuries, Sufism acted as a principal mechanism of mediation among segmentary groups.[11] Among the earliest sufi *Silsilah*s, the shaykhs of Suhrawardiyyah had very close and cordial relations with the Caliphs of Baghdad. They used this relationship for the benefit of the common people. It is reported that the founder of the *Silsilah* Suhrawardiyyah, Shaykh Najib al-Din Abul Qahir al-Suhrawardi (d. 563/circa 1167), also known as Ziya' al-Din Abu Najib al-Suhrawardi, enjoyed such prestige and honour in the eyes of the Caliphs that if anybody sought shelter in his *ribāt* (a type of a sufi dwelling), he could not be forcibly taken away even by the rulers.[12]

Shaykh Najib al-Din's nephew, Shaykh Shihab al-Din Abu Hafs 'Umar al-Suhrawardi (b. 1145-d. 1236), who is considered to be the real founder of the Suhrawardi *Silsilah*, served as the envoy of, and chief religious adviser to, the 'Abbasid Caliph Al-Nasir Li-Din Allah (r. 1180-1225).[13] The Caliph not only founded six *khānqāh*s in Baghdad, he appointed Shaykh Shihab al-Din as the director of several other *khānqāh*s established by others.[14] Shaykh Shihab al-Din helped the 'Abbasid Caliphs in their hour of need. For instance, when the ruler of Khwarizm, Shah Muhammad II (r. 1200-1220) and his armies marched towards Baghdad in 1217-18, it was the Shaykh who dissuaded him from attacking the city.[15] In this case, a sufi shaykh successfully negotiated peace and mediated between two rival political groups.

Shaykh Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi's disciple-caliphs, Shaykh Baha' al-Din Zakariyya of Multan (b. 1182/3 circa-d. 1262) and Shaykh Jalal al-Din Tabrezi (d. 1224/5) spread the Suhrawardi *Silsilah* in India during the thirteenth century. The sufis of the Suhrawardi *Silsilah* in South Asia continued this policy of association with the state and rulers when the further *Silsilah* spread in India. The Suhrawardi sufis had cordial relations with the Sultans of Delhi, and accepted titles, official positions, cash grants and land endowments from the state. The Suhrawardis established their *khānqāhs* in Multan, Uchch and Gujarat. These areas were remote from Delhi--the centre of

political power and the seat of the government. These sufis mediated between the Sultans of Delhi and the provincial rulers and tribes. Lapidus acknowledges that Sufism played a crucial role in integrating the tribal and frontier communities living in the peripheral regions of South Asia into the Sultanate.[16]

In the Islamicate South Asia, helping the rulers and the people in the hour of need by the sufis also led these sufi shaykhs to act as mediators between the political authorities and the Mongol hordes. The Suhrawardi sufis mediated between the state and the external invaders in an effective manner. For instance, in 1246, when the Mongol armies besieged the city of Multan, Shaykh Baha' al-Din Zakariyya interceded on behalf of the political authorities, and negotiated peace with the Mongol leaders. The Shaykh gave one hundred thousand *dinar*s or gold coins to the Mongol leader from his own pocket,[17] and thus, the city of Multan and its inhabitants were saved from destruction, bloodshed and plunder. Since the early Suhrawardi sufis of Multan were quite affluent, they were able to materially help the state and thereby the people in general on such occasions. One may argue that by supporting the rulers in dealing with the Mongol problem, the sufis lent a hand in consolidation of political authority of the Sultanate of Delhi. Nonetheless, seen from another perspective, the gravity of the situation demanded some action on the part of the sufis who stepped in at these critical junctures to ensure security to the common people. It needs to be borne in mind that at these life-threatening moments when the state had failed to perform its obligation of providing security to the people, the sufis took over the role of the state, at least partially, informally and temporarily. Thus we see a civil society rescuing the state as well as the people in the hour of need.

The sufis were also well aware of the fact that the royal armies were an important instrument of the state coercion and atrocities for the common people. Therefore, an important dimension of the mediational role of the sufis was their contribution to conflict resolution between the state and the society. The efforts of the sufis at these critical junctures saved

the lives of hundreds and thousands of people. For instance, in 1327-28, when the Sultan of Delhi, Muhammad ibn Tughluq (r. 1325-51) crushed the rebellion of the Governor of Multan, Bahram Aibah Kishlu Khan, the former ordered a general massacre of the population of the city. On this occasion, Shaykh Rukn al-Din Abul Fath of Multan (d. 1334), who was the grandson of Shaykh Baha' al-Din Zakariyya, requested the Sultan for clemency. The Sultan accepted the request of the Shaykh and pardoned the people.[18] In this way, the Shaykh successfully mediated between the Sultan of Delhi and the people of the city of Multan.

Hagiographical literature suggests that whenever Shaykh Rukn al-Din of Multan went to the royal court in Delhi to see his contemporary Sultans of Delhi, the people, particularly the distressed ones, used to put their petitions in his palanquin. The Shaykh never prevented the people from doing so. The Sultans, considering it an honour, used to issue orders on them, and thus, fulfill the needs of the people.[19] Shaykh Rukn al-Din's spiritual successor or *khalīfah* was Shaykh Saiyyid Jalal al-Din Bukhari, commonly known as Makhdum-i Jahaniyan, (literally meaning the Lord of the Mortals; 1308-1383/4 or 1385), who founded the Uchch branch of the Suhrawardi *Silsilah*. Like his preceptor, whenever he visited the royal court in Delhi in order to see the Sultans, the common people used to put their petitions in his palanquin. Following the tradition of his preceptor, he never prevented them from it. The Sultans of Delhi took it as an honour to issue orders on these petitions.[20]

Shaykh Makhdum-i Jahaniyan successfully used his influence for affecting the state policies. On one occasion, Sultan Muhammad ibn Tughluq's successor, Sultan Firuz Tughluq (r. 1351-88) fixed stipends for the destitute and the poor at the behest of Makhdum-i Jahaniyan.[21] Evidence suggests that on another occasion when there was acute food shortage in Thatta in Sindh, Makhdum-i Jahaniyan pleaded with Sultan Firuz Tughluq at the behest of the people. Consequently, the Sultan ordered reduction in the prices of food items.[22] Court chronicles inform that when Sultan Firuz Tughluq's armies attacked Sindh, which

was ruled by the Samma Dynasty, it was Makhdum-i Jahaniyan who negotiated peace talks, and recommended forgiveness of the conquered rulers and the common people who had resisted the conquest of their territories, and the Sultan obliged.[23] In this way, the Shaykh saved the lives of the people of Thatta. It was the cordial relationship of the Makhdum with the Sultan which enabled him to mediate between the conquerors and the conquered.

The sufis also resolved conflicts at societal level among different social groups. When some rebellious people of Langah tribe (an Afghan tribe settled in various parts of Sindh and Punjab), residing in Alamabad (a city located in present day Sindh near Mirpur Khas), were inclined to undertake a night assault at the city, the inhabitants of the city fearing dire consequences requested Makhdum-i Jahaniyan to come and mediate. Upon his arrival in the city, the Langahs gave up their plan, which pre-empted the ruthless killing of thousands of innocent people.[24]

Silsilah Firdawsiyya is a branch or sub-lineage of Suhrawardi *Silsilah*, which was introduced in India by Khwajah Badr al-Din Samarqandi. During the fourteenth century, the *Silsilah* flourished in Bihar under Shaykh Sharaf al-Din Yahya Maneyri (b. 1263-d. 1381). On one occasion, when Shaykh Sharaf al-Din condemned the killing of Shaykh Ahmad Bihari and Shaykh 'Izz al-Din Kakvi (the two proponents of the philosophy of *Wahdat al-Wujūd*, who were executed when Sultan Firuz convened a *mahzar* or a public debate on their views in Delhi, and the *ulama* and jurists issued a *fatwā* against them), the former was summoned to Delhi from Bihar by the Sultan. However, the royal summons was cancelled by the Sultan himself at the request of Shaykh Makhdum-i Jahaniyan.[25] It reveals that the Shaykh exercised considerable influence over the Sultan. Shaykh Makhdum Jahaniyan also used to write letters to his contemporary rulers such as Sultan Firuz Tughluq and his *umarā*' for helping the aggrieved.[26]

One of the mediation strategies employed successfully by the sufi shaykhs was writing recommendation letters addressed to the kings or the high state officials.[27] These letters were written in a dignified language, devoid of any trace of sycophancy or flattery on the part of the sufi shaykhs which shows their moral authority as well as inner freedom and independence. The renowned Firdawsi sufi, Shaykh Sharaf al-Din Yahya Maneyri also wrote petitions to Sultan Firuz Tughluq on behalf of the common people. For instance, once he requested the Sultan to restore the property of a complainant whose property had been illegally destroyed.[28] The Shaykh also wrote letters to high state officials and *umarā*' such as Dawar Malik (the son-in-law of Sultan Muhammad ibn Tughluq and the then minister for religious endowments), Malik Khizr (deputy-governor of Bihar under Majd al-Mulk, the governor of Bihar), Malik Shams al-Din, and Malik Mufarrih urging them to serve humanity by alleviating the sufferings of the people.[29]

Contrary to the Suhrawardi position, the sufis of the Chishti *Silsilah* followed a considered policy of detachment from the state and political affairs. The Chishti shaykhs distanced themselves from the court and the Sultans of Delhi. Their attitude towards the state was characterized by avoidance of the company of the Sultans of Delhi, rejection of *jāgīr*s (land grants) offered by the state, and shunning of official titles and government service. They debarred their *khulafā*' or spiritual successors from joining the state services, and refrained from involvement in issues of political nature.[30]

Nonetheless, some of the Chishti sufis also extended help to the state and political authorities, and indirectly to the common people, in the hour of need. In particular, they supported the rulers in dealing with the Mongol problem. When the Sultanate of Delhi faced the Mongol invasions during the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, the rulers often sought the help of the sufis. In such an hour of need and in matters of public interest, the sufis extended their help but on such occasions, they were not merely assisting the rulers but serving the common people as well. In the early thirteenth century

during the reign of Sultan Nasir al-Din Qabachah (r. 1211–1228), the independent ruler of Sindh and Multan, his territories were invaded by the Mongol hordes. The Sultan sought the help of his contemporary Chishti sufi, Shaykh Qutb al-Din Bakhtiyar Kaki (d. 1235) in warding off the Mongols.[31] The Shaykh immediately acceded to the request, since the lives of the inhabitants of the city were threatened by the invaders.

The early Chishti sufis like Shaykh Farid al-Din Masud, commonly known as Baba Farid 'Ganj Shakar' (d.1265) seemed to be reluctant to use their influence, but there are instances when they also approached the state officials on behalf of some aggrieved person, or complainant for redressing his grievance. Baba Farid's letter of recommendation on behalf of a needy to Ulugh Khan Balban (the then deputy Sultan), written in a very dignified language, stated: "First I refer this matter to Allah and later to you. If you bestow anything on him (the needy), the real bestower is Allah, and as His agent you will deserve gratitude for doing a favour. But if you fail to bestow anything you are helpless in the matter, as Allah may have prevented you from doing so".[32] Evidence in hagiographical sources suggests that Baba Farid also saved many from the highhandedness and vindictiveness of state officials including an ill-tempered and ruthless Turkish officer appointed in a town near Ajodhan,[33] and a certain *darōghah* (gate-keeper) of Dipalpur.[34] On some occasions, Baba Farid also admonished the state officials like '*āmil* (revenue collector) for ignoring the aggrieved.[35]

There is abundant evidence in *Qiwām al-'Aqāid*, the *malfūz* (the record of the conversation of the sufis generally recorded by one of their closest disciples) of Shaykh Nizam al-Din Awliya', suggesting that the Shaykh got the grievances of the common people redressed from the high state officials who were visiting his *khānqah* in the suburbs of the capital Delhi.[36] Shaykh Nizam al-Din also wrote a few letters of recommendation to the state officials to help the common people. An incident recorded in *Ahsan al-Aqwāl* (the *malfūz* of Shaykh Burhan al-Din Gharib) reveals that once Shaykh Nizam al-Din Awliya' gave a letter to his disciple, Amir Khusrau (d.

1325), which was addressed to the *kotwāl* (head of the police department) of Kilukehri. The letter was meant for intercession on behalf of a complainant.[37]

In 1302/3, during the reign of Sultan 'Ala' al-Din Khalji (r. 1296-1316) when the Mongols under their leader Targhi invaded India and besieged the city of Delhi, the capital of the Sultanate, the Sultan sent his nobles to Shaykh Nizam al-Din Awliya' and asked him to pray for the security and protection of the people. The Shaykh responded by assuring them safety.[38] As pointed out above in the paper, such incidents show that the sufi shaykhs were not only mediating between the people and the state actors, they were also mediating between the rulers and God. Some of the sufis extended help to the rulers on occasions when the fate of the people—be it the common people or the army, hung in balance. When no news about a vast expeditionary army sent to Warangal in Deccan by Sultan 'Ala' al-Din Khalji was received, the Sultan requested Shaykh Nizam al-Din Awliya' to use his intuition and give some information about his army. Responding to it, the Shaykh predicted the conquest of Warangal.[39]

The renowned seventeenth and eighteenth-century Chishti sufi, Shah Nizam al-Din of Aurengabad (b. 1650-d. 1730) was sent to Deccan by his preceptor, where he built a *khānqah* in the city of Aurengabad, and tried to revive the traditions of the Chishti *Silsilah*.[40] He lived with the Mughal army for sometime for the instruction and guidance of the soldiers at the orders of his mentor. During this time, he developed cordial relations with many members of the nobility and the high state officials. It is reported that whenever the distressed people approached him to seek his help for solving some problem, he used to stamp their petitions. Later, the petitioners used to present these petitions to the state officials, who considered it a source of blessing and an honour to address them.[41] Shah Muhammad Sulayman (b. 1770-d. 1850) of Taunsa, a small village near Dera Ghazi Khan, was a *khalīfah* of Shaykh Nur Muhammad Maharvi, who is said to have further popularized the Chishti *Silsilah* in Punjab. On one occasion,

when Nawab Abd al-Samad Khan, the ruler of Dera Ghazi Khan, attacked and besieged the city of Garhi, it was the Shaykh who mediated and negotiated peace talks between the Nawab and the ruler of Garhi.[42]

A plethora of empirical evidence can be cited to establish how the sufis of the Islamicate South Asia mediated between the state and the people on the one hand, and between the conflicting social or political groups on the other hand. However, the present study does not intend to be of exhaustive nature in any sense. The present study has its own limitations, and it is beyond its scope to identify the means and instances of mediation by the sufis belonging to the various *silsilah*s other than the Suhrawardiyya and Chishtiyya. The purpose of the study, as pointed out earlier, is to explore how the sufis of the Islamicate South Asia tried to mitigate differences or resolve conflicts in the state and society by mediating at varied levels in the polity.

After analyzing the empirical data cited above, it can be inferred that some of the sufi shaykhs were successful in influencing the government policies in favour of the people, and positively affecting the behavior and attitude of the rulers and the ruling elite towards the common people and other political and social groups. Nonetheless, the sufis who collaborated with the state, or associated themselves with the rulers, or those having cordial relations with the rulers and the state officials were in a better position to mediate between the rulers and the common people than those who kept the rulers at bay. In this regard, the sufi shaykhs of the Suhrawardi *Silsilah*, who were quite influential in social terms, had a direct access to the kings and nobles, and therefore, they not only mediated between the state/political authorities and the poor and the needy, they also mediated between the rulers and the Mongol invaders at critical moments. They successfully used their influence for helping the aggrieved redress their grievances from those in power.

The study also reveals that many of the sufi shaykhs belonging to the Chishti *Silsilah* had a different orientation

towards temporal power, which they saw as a source of corruption of the human soul. They tried to avoid the company of the kings and nobles, and preferred to remain aloof from the court. These sufis performed the mediational role in their own way. Despite maintaining a distance from those in power, they never hesitate to help the aggrieved through intercession on behalf of the complainants. Some of them wrote recommendation letters for this purpose, while others directly mediated between the conflicting social groups in order to resolve the conflict. Nonetheless, the mediational functions performed by the Suhrawardi and Chishti sufis cannot be categorized, since the sufi goal of bringing comforts to the hearts impelled them to go to whatever extent they could. The affiliation of *silsilah* did not prevent them from helping those in need, be the common people in distress or the rulers threatened by the ruthless Mongol invaders.

Keywords: Sufism, South Asian sufis, mediation, state-society relationship

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Notes and References

1 The term 'Islamicate' as an adjective was coined by Marshall G. S. Hodgson in 1960s. Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), pp. 57-60. The usage of the term is not restricted to the practice of Islam as a religion. According to Eaton, the term was "intended to capture a broader, more flexible, and less communal notion of culture than is conveyed by the more narrowly defined religious terms 'Muslim' or 'Islamic'". See introduction in Richard M. Eaton, ed. *India's Islamic Traditions, 711-1750* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 13.

2 See, for instance, Paul L. Heck, ed., *Sufism and Politics: The Power of Spirituality* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2007).

3 Tanvir Anjum, "Historical Trajectory of the Development of the Concept of Civil Society in Europe: From Aristotle to

Gramsci", *Journal of Political Studies*, Dept. of Political Science, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Vol. 17, Issue 2, Winter 2010, pp. 147-60.

4 Foote, for instance, examines the role and functions of ecclesiastical institutions in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Italy as a mode of civil society, and concludes that religious organizations may also be included within the scope of civil society. See David Foote, *Lordship, Reform, and the Development of Civil Society in Medieval Italy: The Bishopric of Orvieto, 1100-1250* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004).

5 To quote Hanafi: "Islamic theory and practice sustain a number of legitimate human groupings existing between the state and the individual. These groupings are endowed with their own sphere of autonomy free from government intrusion, which made Islamic societies historically far less monolithic and undifferentiated than some Western stereotypes of a theocratic society allow." Hasan Hanafi, "Alternative Conceptions of Civil Society: A Reflective Islamic Approach" in *Alternative Conceptions of Civil Society*, eds. Simone Chambers and Will Kymlicka (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002), pp. 172-75; for details see 171-89.

6 For a detailed discussion, see Tanvir Anjum, "The Idea and Practice of Civil Society in Muslim Polities: The Problèmatique, and a Critique of Euro-American Perspectives", *Islamic Studies*, Islamic Research Institute (IRI), International Islamic University, Islamabad (IIUI), Vol. 51, No. 1, Spring 2012, (forthcoming)

7 For details, see Tanvir Anjum, "From Confrontation to Collaboration: Contemporary Discourse on the State-Civil Society Relational Models", *Journal of Political Studies*, Dept. of Political Science, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Issue XVII, Summer 2010, pp. 93-102.

8 Masoud Kamali, *Multiple Modernities, Civil Society and Islam: The Case of Iran and Turkey* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006), pp. 40-41.

9 Saiyyid Muhammad Mubarak 'Alawi Kirmani alias Amir Khurd, *Siyar al-Awliyā*', (comp. in 1351-82 A.D.), ed.

Chiranji Lal (Delhi: Muhibb-i Hind Press, 1302 A.H./1885 A.D.), p. 46. Henceforth, referred to as Amir Khurd.

10 For a brief discussion of mediational Sufism with reference to mediation between God and human beings, see Arthur F. Buehler, *Sufi Heirs of the Prophet: The Indian Naqshbandiyya and the Rise of the Mediating Sufi Shaykh* (Columbia; SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), pp. 168-69.

11 Ira M. Lapidus, "Tribes and State Formation in Islamic History" in *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East*, eds. Philip Shukry Khoury and Joseph Kostiner (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. 43.

12 Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, *Some Aspects of the Religion and Politics in India during the Thirteenth Century* (Aligarh: Department of History, Muslim University, 1961), p. 252.

13 Qamar-ul Huda, *Striving for Divine Union: Spiritual Exercises for Suhrawardī Sūfīs* (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), pp. 18 and 31.

14 Jonathan P. Berkey, *The Formation of Islam: Religion and Society in the Near East, 600-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 241-42.

15 *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed., vol. VII, art. Al-Nāsir Lī-Din Allāh by Angelika Hartmann, p. 997.

16 Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, 2 ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002; first published 1988), p. 367.

17 For some details, see Nizami, *Some Aspects of the Religion and Politics in India during the Thirteenth Century*, p. 256.

18 Barani, *Tārīkh-i Fīrūzshāhī*, p. 479, Yahya ibn Ahmad bin 'Abd Allah Sirhindi, *Tārīkh-i Mubārakshāhī*, (comp. in 1434) Eng. trans. with notes K. K. Basu (Karachi: Karimsons, 1977 rpt., first published 1932), pp. 100-101, and Farishtah, *Tārīkh-i Farishtah*, vol. II, p. 20. However, 'Isami states that Shaykh Rukn al-Din retreated into meditation for a week, and when he came out of it, he was apprised of the on-going massacre in the city. Upon this, he requested the Sultan to stop it, when already a lot many lives had been lost. Mawlana 'Isami, *Futūh al-Salātīn* (*Shahnāmah-'i Hind*), (comp. in 1348), ed. Agha

Mahdi Husain (Allahabad: Hindustani Academy, 1938), p. 427. However, Rizvi has rejected the account of 'Isami. Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1986), vol. 1, p. 213.

19 Amir Khurd, *Siyar al-Awliyā*', pp. 138-39. See also Hakim Muhammad Qasim Ferishta, *Tarikh-i Ferishta* (*Tazkirah-i Mashaikh-i Karam*) Urdu trans. (Lahore: Ahsan Brothers, 1965), pp. 163-64.

20 Saiyyid 'Ala al-Din, *Al-Durr al-Manzūm fi Tarjuma Malfūz al-Makhdūm*, Urdu trans. of *Jāmi' al-'Ulūm* (the malfūz of Makhdum Jahaniyan (Multan: 1377 AH), p. 46, as cited in Muhammad Aslam, *Malfūzātī Adab kī Tārīkhī Ahammiyyat* (Lahore: Research Society of Pakistan, University of the Punjab, 1995), p. 211.

21 'Ala al-Din, *Al-Durr al-Manzūm*, p. 925 cited in Aslam, *Malfūzātī Adab kī Tārīkhī Ahammiyyat*, p. 211.

22 Sakhawat Mirza, *Tazkirah-i Hazrat Makhdum Jahaniyan Jahan Gasht* (Hyderabad: Institute of Indo-Middle East Cultural Studies, 1962), pp. 35-36.

23 Shams Siraj 'Afif, *Tārīkh-i Fīrūzshāhī*, ed. Wilayat Husain (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1910), pp. 241-42.

24 Saiyyid Ala al-Din Ali ibn Sa'ad Husayni, *Al-Durr al-Manzum fi Tarjumah Malfuz al-Makhdum*, (Urdu translation of *Jāmi' al-'Ulum*, the *malfuzat* of Makhdum Jahaniyan), (Multan, 1377 AH, p. 97), as cited in Aslam, *Malfūzātī Adab kī Tārīkhī Ahammiyyat*, p. 222.

25 Shah Shu'ayb Firdawsi, *Manāqib al-Asfiyā'* (Lucknow: Newal Kishore, 1870), p. 346.

26 Mirza, *Tazkirah-i Hazrat Makhdum Jahaniyan Jahan Gasht*, p. 36.

27 In Indian history, the first sufi who systematically employed the medium of extensive correspondence or letter-writing was the Naqshbandi sufi, Shaykh Ahmad Faruqi Sirhindi (d. 1624). He wrote letters of recommendation to the state officials. For instance, he made them requests for releasing the prisoners, giving jobs to the unemployed including the scholars, and getting stipends for the poor and pensions for the elderly, etc.

See Yohanan Friedmann, *Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi: An Outline of his Thought and a Study of his Image in the Eyes of Posterity* (Montreal: McGill University, Institute of Islamic Studies, 1971), pp. 79-80. The Naqshbandi *Silsilah*, also known as *Silsilah-i Khawajgan*, was though founded by Khwaja Ahmad Ata Yasvi (d. 1161), Khwaja Baha al-Din Naqshband (d. 1389) of Turkistan is considered to be its real founder. It was introduced in India by Khwaja Muhammad Baqi Bi-Allah (b.1563-d. 1603), whose disciple and *khalifa*, Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi popularized the *Silsilah* in India. The sub-branch Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya is named after him.

28 See, for instance, Shaykh Sharaf al-Din Maneyri's letter to Sultan Firuz Tughluq, which contained a petition on behalf of Khwaja Abid Zafarabadi, whose property had been illegally destroyed. Sharaf al-Din Ahmad Yahya Maneri, *In Quest of God: Maneri's Second Collection of 150 Letters*, translation, introduction, and notes by Paul Jackson (Anand, Gujarat: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 2004), see letter no. 95 on pp. 199-200.

29 Ibid., see letters no. 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 96 and 104 on pp. 103-19, 200-202, 215-16. See also note 233, p. 302. See also Paul Jackson, *The Way of a Sufi: Sharafuddin Maneri* (Delhi: *Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Delli*, 1987), p. 111.

30 Tanvir Anjum, *Chishti Sufis in the Sultanate of Delhi: From Restrained Indifference to Calculated Defiance* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 3.

31 Story has it that the Shaykh gave the Sultan an arrow, and asked him to shoot it blindly into the camp of the Mongol forces. Qabachah did the same, and the next day the Mongols retreated. Sijzi, *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād*, p. 185, Amir Khurd, *Siyar al-Awliyā'*, p. 50, and Jamali, *Siyar al-'Ārifīn*, p. 19.

32 Amir Khurd, *Siyar al-Awliyā'*, p. 72. Nizami maintains that the letter was addressed to *Sultan* Balban. Idem, *Some Aspects of the Religion and Politics in India during the Thirteenth Century*, p. 243. See also Appendix for the text of the letter written in Arabic, p. 354. However, Baba Farid died in 1265, i.e. one year before the accession of Balban to the throne of Delhi, which took place in 1266. Therefore, the letter must have been written to Ulugh Khan Balban, the deputy-Sultan of

Sultan Nasir al-Din Mahmud, before his assumption of kingship as 'Ghiyath al-Din' Balban.

33 Shaykh Jamali, the sixteenth-century hagiographer who authored *Siyar al-'Ārifīn* (comp. between 1531-35 A.D.) informs that in a town near Ajodhan, a ruthless Turkish officer was appointed. He had a falcon, which he had entrusted to the care of his *mīr-i shikār* (the officer in-charge of the royal hunt). Once the *mīr-i shikār* lost the falcon, and he approached Baba Farid in panic, as he feared that the Turk would exterminate him and his entire family as a punishment. The Shaykh assisted the panic-stricken *mīr-i shikār* in locating the lost falcon by his intuitive powers. For details of the incident, see Shaykh Hamid ibn Hamid ibn Fazl Allah Jamali, *Siyar al-'Ārifīn*, (Delhi: Rizwi Press, 1311 A.H./1893 A.D.), pp. 42-43.

34 Once Baba Farid helped a certain person recover his wife, who had been enslaved during a raid on a village by the *darōghah* (gate-keeper) of Dipalpur. For details of the incident, see Amir Khurd, *Siyar al-Awliyā*', pp. 83-84, and Jamali, *Siyar al-'Ārifīn*, pp. 44-45.

35 According to an anecdote recounted in *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād*, Shaykh Farid al-Din Masud (Baba Farid) was once approached by an '*āmil* (revenue collector) for help, who was being harassed by the *wālī* or governor of Ajodhan. The Shaykh sent a message to the *wālī* not to harass the '*āmil*, but the *wālī* did not pay much heed to the intercession, and instead started creating more troubles for the '*āmil*. The '*āmil* again came to Baba Farid, and told him everything. The Shaykh replied that probably once he (the '*āmil*) might have been approached by someone on behalf of an aggrieved for intercession, and he must have not been sympathetic and helped out. Upon hearing this, the '*āmil* promised that he would never ignore an aggrieved in the future. Later, not only the relations of the '*āmil* with the *wālī* were normalized, the latter also visited the *jamā'atkhānah* of Baba Farid and sought forgiveness. Amir Hasan 'Ala' Sijzi Dehlavi, *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād*, (*Malfūz* of Khwajah Nizam al-Din Awliya'), ed. Khwajah Hasan Thani Nizami Dehlavi (Delhi: Urdu Academy, 1992 rpt., first published 1990), p. 250. See also Jamali, *Siyar al-'Ārifīn*, pp. 36-37.

36 Muhammad Jamal Qiwam, *Qiwām al-'Aqā'id*, Urdu trans. and Introduction Nithar Ahmad Faruqi (Rampur: Jami'ah al-'Ulum Furqaniyyah, Idarah-'i Nashar-o Isha'at, 1994), passim.

37 Hammad ibn 'Imad Kashani, *Ahsan al-Aqwāl*, MS, Mawlana Azad Library, Muslim University, Aligarh, *Fārsī*, *Madhhab*, *Tasawwuf*, no. 318, f. 37b.

38 According to Farishtah, owing to the Shaykh's prayers, the Mongol army retreated the next day, and the people of Delhi took it as a miracle of the Shaykh. Muhammad Abul Qasim Hindu Shah Farishtah, *Tārīkh-i Farishtah*, Urdu trans. Mawlawi Muhammad Fida 'Ali Talib, (Hyderabad: Dar al-Tab' Jami'ah 'Uthmaniyyah, 1926), vol. 1, p. 382.

39 Ziya' al-Din Barani, *Tārīkh-i Fīrūzshāhī*, (comp. in 1359), ed. Saiyyid Ahmad Khan (Calcutta: Bibliotheca Indica, The Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1862), pp. 331-32. See also a similar version in Farishtah, *Tārīkh-i Farishtah*, vol. 1, pp. 401-2. Cf. Qiwam, *Qiwām al-'Aqā'id*, pp. 94-95 and Jamali, *Siyar al-'Ārifīn*, pp. 77-78 for slightly different versions of the incident.

40 Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, *Tarikh-i Mashaikh-i Chisht*, vol. 5 (Delhi: Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Delli, 1982), pp. 151, 159.

41 Ibid., pp. 157-58, 160.

42 Ibid., p. 377.