

## SOCIAL ROLE OF SUFIS IN THE PRINCIPALITIES OF CHANDERI AND NAGOUR

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### Abstract:

*In modern times, the social role performed by the Sufis in India during medieval times has received attention of scholars. It has been rightly conceived that no history of life and culture of medieval India would be considered complete without a reference to Sufis and Sufism in medieval India. No doubt, the leading Sufis being the charismatic leaders catered to the spiritual needs of people in the towns and the area around. Much useful work has been done on Indian Sufis both in English and in Urdu. The scholars of Sufism in India are from not only South Asian countries but some of them belonged to Europe and America also. However, the role of Sufis in the development of urban centre has not received adequate attention. The relevant evidence contained in different sources help the delineation of the role performed by the Sufis in the establishment of cordial relationship between the followers of different religions, progress of composite culture, formation of communal harmony and religious toleration and above all the development of urban centre. In this chapter, an attempt has been made to study the role played by the Sufis of Nagaur and Chanderi.*

### KEY WORDS:

Principalities ,charismatic leaders ,modern times , process of urbanization.

### INTRODUCTION:

One of the most significant aspects of the lives of the Sufis (religious divines), which has not been properly analysed is their contribution in the process of urbanization. An attempt has been made to highlight their role from the evidences, gleaned from chronicles and hagiographic literature.

It may be pointed out that the Sufis as a matter of principle preferred to settle down on the outskirts of the cities<sup>1</sup>. However, with the passage of time, people from outside began to come and settle around the Khanqahs.

As result of this, either the villages merged in to cities or there emerged a new city. It may be pointed out that these khanqahs functioned as higher seat of learning, in addition to its being a charity house. The head Sufi delivered lectures on subjects such as Sufism, tafsir (commentary on the Quran) fiqh (Jurisprudence) and the hadith (traditions of the prophet of Islam). The langar (kitchen) attached to the khanqah provided free food to the indigent and poor. Innumerable persons who came to visit the famous Sufi saints with their problems sought his blessing and returned home with solace and mental peace. Ziauddin Barani has described this process in detail, when the famous Chishti saint Sheikh Nizamuddin Auliya settled at Gheyaspur, on the outskirts of Delhi. Barani informs us that from Delhi to Gheyaspur, platforms with thatched roofs were constructed, wells were dug, vessels were kept, and a hafiz was stationed at every platform so that the people going to visit Sheikh may have no difficulty in saying prayers<sup>2</sup>. It would appear from the above description that by the time of Alauddin Khalji, Gheyaspur has emerged as

big township.

Besides this, there is evidence contained in the hagiographical literature to show that many Sufis were deputed by their spiritual masters to settle down in far off regions. In compliance of the orders of their master, they went to unknown places and spent their lives in propagating the teachings of their master over a period of time these remote unknown palaces acquired name and fame due to their associations with those saints and ultimately emerged as important urban centre. Gulzar-i-Abrar provides us information about the foundation of the city of Burhanpur. According to Muhammad Ghaus Shattari, the city of Burhanpur was founded by Sultan Nisiruddin Farooqi and named after Sheikh Burhanuddin Gharib, a senior disciple of Sheikh Nizamuddin Auliya. It would appear from the above account that it was a common practice with the ruler's to settle Ulema and Sufis in the newly founded cities and towns and gave them either land grants or stipends for their maintenance<sup>4</sup>. This was obviously done to increase the popularity of the ruler's as the Ulema and Sufis were held in high esteem by the soldiers and the masses, and patronage extended to them would achieve the desired result. It may however also be pointed out that the Ulema and Sufis were an important factor in the process of urbanization because people needed them very much for religious guidance. It was a popular belief that their presence in a town or city warded off the evil of natural calamities, as well as caused general prosperity. People also sought their intercession for all type of problems, the birth of a male child, recovery from illness and success in worldly career etc<sup>5</sup>.

In addition to this references, contained in the hagiographical sources tend to show increase in the social mobility as result of the activities of the Sufis in the urban centre. There is evidence to show that weavers, dyers, and even sweepers became murids (disciples) of prominent Sufi saints and embraced Islam under the influence of their Pir (preceptors). One of the disciples of Sheikh Husain Nagauri was a local sweeper, who had embraced Islam under his influence. It is said that this sweeper perfumed religious exercises under his master's guidance and soon turned into a devout Sufi<sup>6</sup>.

It would appear from the available sources, that there were many Sufis and scholars who played an important role in disseminating learning and making Chanderi and Nagaur the seats of culture. We may give an account, here of some of the leading Sufis and scholar's who had settled down in Chanderi, because their presence in the city enhanced its prestige in medieval times.

Maulana Wajihuddin Yusuf, a senior khalifa of the famous Shishti saint Sheikh Nizamuddin Auliya seems to be the first Sufi to settle down at Chanderi. Among the early authorities, Mir Khurd has referred to the circumstances in which Maulana Yusuf came to settle down at Chanderi. According to him during the reign of Alauddin Khalji, a Wali (governor) who was a disciple of Sheikh Nizamuddin Auliya, was sent with a large force to conquer Chanderi. He requested the Chishti saint to send one of his khalifa's for moral and spiritual support. Accordingly, Maulana Yusuf was deputed to participate in the expedition<sup>7</sup>. After the conquest of Chanderi, Maulana Yusuf settled down at Chanderi. If some one from Chanderi comes to become a disciple of Sultan-ul-Mashaikh, he would send him back to become a disciple of Maulana Yusuf at Chanderi. As a result, large number of the people of Chanderi became disciple of Maulana Yusuf. Mir Khurd relates a number of stories about the infinite devotion of Maulana Yusuf to his Pir Sheikh Nizamuddin Auliya<sup>8</sup>.

Mir Khurd had also narrated an event of Maulana Yusuf's desire to shift Lakhnauti. According to him owing to the high handedness of Malik Tamar, the Wali of Chanderi, most of his soldiers who were disciples of Shikh Nizamuddin Auliya, left Chanderi. Maulana Yusuf was approached by one of his friend to shift Lakhnauti, where he had jagir. Maulana Yusuf replied he had been sent to Chanderi by his Pir and therefore he could not leave it without his permission. After some days Maulana Yusuf went to see his Pir in Delhi and narrated the whole episode before him. The Shaikh is reported to have said to Maulana Yusuf, "Live in Chanderi or some where else, you would remain under the protection of God".

Maulana Yusuf replied that since you have named Chanderi first, I would remain in Chanderi<sup>9</sup>. Maulana Yusuf spent his last days in Chanderi and seems to have died around 1328-29. His followers in Chanderi built his tomb.

Under the fostering care of Sultans of Delhi, Chanderi which was seat of Muqta emerged as an important centre of learning and culture. The Muqtas encouraged Ulema, Mashaikh and scholars to settle in their iqtas and made their court rendezvous of scholar. Ibn Battuta has mentioned his meeting with the governor of Chanderi Azam Malik. He describes him as an accomplished man of great virtue, who mixes with the man of learning. He has named some of the leading scholars who were with Azam Malik at Chanderi. Among them, jurist Izzudin-al-Zuberi, the learned jurist Wajihuddin-al-Biani, jurist and Qazi better known as Qazi Khassa and the local imam Shamsuddin are specifically mentioned by Ibn Battuta<sup>10</sup>. Ibn Battuta's narrative makes it clear that Chanderi has become abode for many scholar's who specialized in different subjects.

Chanderi retained its position as centre of learning under the independent Sultans of Malwa. They

welcomed scholars, Ulema and mashaikhs at their court and extended all kind of help to them. This became possible owing to the decline of Delhi as cultural centre and consequent flight of scholars to different regions. One such ruler to extend patronage to the scholars was Qadar Khan, son of Sultan Hoshang Shah, founder of the independent principality of Chanderi. He was patron of man of letters and his court was refuge for many poets and learned man. It was infact his fame as a patron of learning which had spread far and wide that led Qadi Khan Badr Dharwal, the author of well-known work *Adatul Fuzala* to leave Jaunpur and come to the court of Qadar Khan at Chanderi.

It would appear from the preface of *Adatul Fuzala* that Qadi was attached to the Sharqi court of Jaunpur, but later on decided to move to the court of Qadar Khan at Chanderi. Qadi Khan writes in the preface of his work about Qadar Khan, "In the year 1419 A. D. I started from Jaunpur for kissing the dust of the lofty threshold of the residents of the court of the pride of the khans of grandees achievements, and the high doorstep of the habitants of the audience-hall of the most dignified of the khaqans of Caesar's glories, the regulator of the organizations of the affairs of the well being of the universe, the layer of the foundation of the places of the affairs of sovereignty by right; the tahmatan of the universe and the commander of the world, Khan-i-Azam Khaqan-i-Muazzam Masnad-i-Ali Qadr Khan, May Allah perpetuate his grades of glory and preserve the lamp of his government from the blows of adversity."

It would appear from the above account that Chanderi has emerged as an important cultural centre, attracting scholars from different areas. Qadi Khan further writes that the court of Qadar Khan was full of scholars and learned men. It would not be out of context to quote him at length. According to Qadi Khan, "the savants and the jurists, the dresses of whose life is embroidied with the decoration of (the tradition) the learned men among my followers are like the prophets of the Bani Israil have taken abode and made their residence in the shadow of his government and kindness and the accomplished man and poets who are in creating mew styles in artifices of words and novelties of meaning, the champions in the battlefields of eloquence and rhetorics, have chosen shelter under the protection of his greatness and liberality."<sup>12</sup>

The evidences contained in *Adatul Fuzala* would also go to suggest that Chanderi had grown into an important centre of learning and culture. Chanderi was full of scholars who specialized in subject's such as Sufism, tafsir (commentary on Quran), fiqh (Jurisprudence) and the hadith (traditions of the prophet of Islam). In course of time, it has become so important that many scholar's preferred it to Jaunfur, the capital of Sharqi kingdom.

Epigraphic evidence from Chanderi mentions the name of Shaikh Burhan, as an important saint of Chanderi. Shaikh Burhan, son of Yaqub seems to have been a saint of great repute and held in high esteem by the ruler's of Chanderi. An epigraph dated 1433 A. D. refers to the construction of a tank by Hoshang Shah ruler of Malwa in order to commemorate the name of Shaikh Burhan.<sup>13</sup> It may be pointed out that Sheikh Burhan was a local saint and had not been mentioned in the historical works and hagiographic literature.

We may now give an account of some of the leading Sufis who had settled down at Nagaur. It may be pointed out that Nagaur along with Ajmer were the chief centre of Chishti silsila (order). Shaikh Hamiduddin, a distinguished disciple and khalifa of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti of Ajmer seems to be the fist Sufi to have settled down at Nagaur. He had settled at Nagur at the instance of his spiritual master and earned his livelihood by plaguing a bigha of land.<sup>14</sup> He was the first Muslim child to see the light of the day in Delhi after its conquest by the forces of Sultan Moizzuddin.<sup>15</sup> In his early years he led a very voluptuous life but he joined the circle of Muinuddin's disciples, he abandoned the world and applied himself to the life of austerity. Moved by his devotion to spiritual exercise, his Pir gave him the title of Sultan-ul-Tarikin (king of Recluses).<sup>16</sup> Shaikh Hamiduddin lived like a peasant at Sawal, a small village in Nagaur. His total property was small mud house and a bigha of land, half of which was cultivated in one season, the other half in the next.<sup>17</sup> There was a cow in the house and the Sheikh himself milked it.<sup>18</sup> His wife a peasant women used to spin and prepare cloth.<sup>19</sup> Shaikh Hamiduddin was a strict vegetarian. His dislike for meat eating was so great that he forbade his disciples not to distribute meat preparation for the blessing of his soul after his death.<sup>20</sup> The family of the Shaikh converse mostly in Hindvi. It is written in Sarur-us-Sudur "Bazaban Hindvi Guftand" (he talked in Hindvi).<sup>21</sup> Shaikh Hamiduddin kept himself aloof from state machinery. He refused to take more land and money from muqta of Nagaur and Sultan of Delhi. The Sheikh had totally rejected all materialistic pursuits, but he never permitted anyone to live like a parasite. He exhorted people to be busy in some work and earn their bread with the sweat of their brow.<sup>22</sup> The Sheikh was bitterly critical of the people who indulge in ihtikar (hoarding and black marketing). He is reported to have said, "Their happiness lies in the misery of others."<sup>23</sup> The Sheikh spent most of his time in teaching hadith to the people of Nagaur. Sarurus sudur contains an interesting information in this regard, where the Sheikh said to one of his disciples I am busy nowadays to teach hadith to the people of Nagaur and therefore I do not have time to lecture you on Sufism. Shaikh Hamiduddin was an outstanding scholar having a deep and critical insight in

to the classical literature. He is the author of the famous work *Asul-i-Tariqa* which was very popular among scholars and Sufis.<sup>24</sup> The Sheikh was also a poet and is reported to have composed poetry in Arabic, Persian, and Hindavi.<sup>25</sup> Shaikh Hamiduddin died on 29 Rabi II/I Nov. 1274 and was buried at Nagaur.<sup>26</sup> Mohammad-bin-Tughlaq erected a tomb over his remains in 1331-32.<sup>27</sup> Other construction including a gateway were built by Sheikh Husain Nagauri.<sup>28</sup>

The most important Suhrawardi saint who spent some time in Nagaur was Qazi Hamiduddin Nagauri, a prominent disciple and khalifa of Sheikh Shihabuddin Suhrawardi. He was born in Bokhara. His father Ataullah Mahmud migrated to Delhi some time before 1200 and died there. Shaikh Hamiduddin held the post of Qazi of Nagaur for three years.<sup>29</sup> While at Nagaur Qazi Hamiduddin seems to have attended the lecture of Maulana Raziuddin Hasan Saghani on book of hadith, entitled *Misbah-al-Duja*. A Qazi's life did not appeal to Hamiduddin, and left for Baghdad where he became Sheikh Suhrawardi's disciple. He met and entered into intimate friendship with Khwaja Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki. He traveled to Hejaz and then came to Delhi. Although a Suhrawardi Qazi Hamiduddin took keen interest in the performance of sama. He made vigorous attempt to popularize the practice of sama, and the Ulema bitterly opposed to this, were unable to suppress it. He is reported to have organized many sama gatherings in which Chishti saint Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki took active part. Qazi Hamiduddin died in 1246 A.D. and was buried in Delhi.<sup>30</sup>

Another important Chishti saint who won followers among various sections of people in Nagaur was Shaikh Hussain Nagauri. He was a direct descendant of Shaikh Hamiduddin Nagauri (d. 1274 A.D.) and Murid and Khalifa of Sheikh Kabir. Seized with the passion for divine love, Sheikh Husain left for Gujrat and joined the circle of Sheikh Kabir's murids. Under the care of his Pir, he performed several spiritual exercises, and returned home with spiritually developed personality. His deep learning and scholarship in Islamic sciences made him famous in North-India and he attracted murids from different places. It is to his credit that he revived the glory of Nagaur as a centre of religion and culture.

He lived like a Rajasthani peasant. He put on ordinary clothes which were often torn, drove his own bullock cart, and took care of his livestock like an ordinary cultivator.<sup>31</sup> Shaikh Husain visited Ajmer frequently to look after the grave of Shaikh Muinuddin Chishti (d. 1236 A. D.) the Pir of his ancestor and pioneer of the Chishti silsila in India.<sup>32</sup> Among his murids were rich as well as poor. Sultan Ghayasuddin (1469-150), the ruler of Malwa, accorded a grand reception to him on his arrival in Mandu to see the hair of the prophet and also offered huge treasure as an offering.<sup>33</sup> Khan-i-Azam Ahmad Khan Lodi Sarang Khani, muqta of Jaunpur during the reign of Sikandar Lodi (1487-1517) was one of his devout murid.<sup>34</sup> Besides the ruling elite and rich people, his disciples included even untouchables and low caste people. One of such murid was a local sweeper who had embraced Islam under his influence. It is said that this sweeper performed religious exercises under his master's guidance and soon became a devoted Sufi. Many traditions seem to have developed about his spiritual powers and miracles.<sup>35</sup>

Moreover, Sheikh Husain Nagauri was an outstanding scholar and prolific writer. He wrote a tafsir (exegesis) on the Quran called *Anwar-al-Nabi* (the light of the prophet).<sup>36</sup> A separate volume was written for every para (chapter) of the thirty volumes, only the volume relating to the first para is extant.<sup>37</sup> He also wrote several treatises in Persian on Sufism.<sup>38</sup> Of them his commentary on Imam Ghazali's spiritual autobiography was very popular.<sup>39</sup>

The *malfizat* of Sheikh Husain Nagauri were compiled by Sultan Ghayasuddin of Malwa during his two months stay at the latter's court. The collection of the *malfizat* was named by the Sheikh as *Asrar-al-Nabi* (The mysteries of the prophet).<sup>40</sup>

The great Sheikh also took interest in the construction of buildings, both of religious character and public utility and planted gardens in Ajmer and Nagaur. He built the tomb of Muinuddin Chishti over his grave in Ajmer with the money brought from Malwa. Similarly in Nagaur also, the Shaikh constructed number of buildings the lofty gate of the tomb of Shaikh Hamiduddin was built by him.<sup>41</sup> Besides these, he constructed a huge tank in Nagaur and named it 'Mustafa Sagar' after the prophet of Islam. Likewise, the garden planted by him in Nagaur was named as *Mustafa Bari*.<sup>42</sup> He used to feed people on a large scale on the death anniversary of Sheikh Hamiduddin Nagauri. In keeping with the tradition of his ancestor Sheikh Hamiduddin Nagauri he had only vegetarian food cooked such as rice, vegetable and also yoghurt etc. He went out of his way to help the hungry people. At times, he shared his meal even with lepers.<sup>43</sup> He considered the service of humankind to be the best form of religious worship. Shaikh Husain Nagauri breathed his last at Nagaur in 1495 A. D. and was buried within the compound of Sufi Hamiduddin's shrine very close to his grave at the foot side.<sup>44</sup>

Shaikh Ahmad Majd was prominent disciple and khalifa of Sheikh Husain Nagauri. He was born at Narnole. He was brought up and educated in Gujarat. After completing his education at the age of 15, he proceeded to Ajmer to enter into the fold of Sheikh Husain Nagauri. He spent most of his time at the shrine of Sheikh Muinuddin Chishti. At the spiritual instance of Khwaja Ajmeri in 1516, he informed the people of

Ajmer about the impending attack of Rana Sanga and advised them to leave the place. He himself left Ajmer with a small group and came to Narnaul. One day he saw dream that God had called him in heaven. He therefore thought to be at his Pir's place and left for Nagaur, where he passed away in 1521 and was buried at the feet of his Sheikh Husain Nagauri.<sup>45</sup> Another important Sufi, who settled down at Bari khattu in the jael tahsil of Nagaur district, was Baba Ishaq Maghribi. Baba Ishaq was a native of Delhi and was held in high esteem by Mohammad bin Tughlaq.<sup>46</sup> During the time of Firoz Shah Tughlaq Baba Ishaq attained considerable fame and many nobles including Razi-ul-Mulk, Naib-i-Arz joined the circle of his disciples. Due to Razi-ul-Mulk attachment with him, many soldiers also became his murids.<sup>47</sup> Baba Ishaq spent some time in prayer and penitence at the Masjid Khan-i-Jahan, which was a great centre of mystic activity in those days.<sup>48</sup> According to Abul Fazl, Baba Ishaq settled at Khattu on spiritual direction from Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti.<sup>48</sup> Baba Ishaq belonged to the famous mystic order of Africa known as Silsilah-i-Maghribiya, which was founded by Sheikh Abu Madyan-al-Maghribi. Baba Ishaq became a disciple of Haji Mohammad Kaim. Baba Ishaq was a frequent visitor of Nagaur, Didwana and Ladnun. It would appear from Tuhfatul Majalis that Baba Ishaq died in 1374-75 at Khattu.

His chief disciple and khalifa was Sheikh Ahmad Khattu. Shaikh Ahmad was born in Delhi in 1337-38. He was carried away from his dwelling in a tempest of wind. Loosing his way after some time, he fell into the hands of Baba Ishaq in Khattu who gave him shelter and brought him up.<sup>50</sup> After the death of Baba Ishaq (d. 1374-75) he left Khattu and remained in Delhi for some time. Later on, he settled down at Sarkhej near Ahmadabad. Shaikh Ahmad died in 1446 and tomb over his grave was constructed by Qutbuddin Ahmad (1451-59), the Sultan of Gujarat.

Shaikh Sulaiman, a descendant of the famous Suhrawardi saint and scholar Qazi Hamiduddin Nagauri, was a prominent Sufi of Nagaur during Sur period. He was held in high esteem by the Sur official. An important inscription refers to the redemption and restoration of the Pusal of Kirat chand at the instance of Masnad-i-Ali Yusuf Daulat Khan, son of Husain Sur at the recommendation of Shaikhul Mashaikh Sulaiman in 1552.<sup>51</sup> It would appear from another inscriptions that Sheikh Sulaiman, son of Sheikh Bikh, was the spiritual successor of Qazi Hamiduddin Nagauri and the head of the Nagaur Khanqah.<sup>52</sup> Shaikh Sulaiman seems to be alive until 1566-67, in which year he constructed the tomb of Qazi Hamiduddin at Delhi. Nagaur deserves special place as a centre of learning because of the fact that it supplied to the court of Akbar two great literary and political scholars namely the celebrated Sheikh Abul Fazl and his brother Faizi sons of the illustrious Sheikh Mubarak Nagauri.

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