

Chishti Sufis in the Upper Gangetic Valley: Pre-existing Linguistic and Ritualistic Traditions

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Tasawwuf, its philosophy and practices occupies seminal place in socio-intellectual history of Indian Muslims. For, besides considering State as a sinful entity since the early times, sufis maintained a distance from the Umayyad and Abbasid regimes. They considered, 'Ali, as the repository of knowledge and inheritor of 'secrets'. Yet, they never identified themselves with shi'as politically or theoretically. They opposed the sects of kharijites and murjiets, and maintained a distinct identity. Ultimately, tasawwuf emerged as the 'post-graduate creed of Islam' and attracted noble and pious souls. The creed of tasawwuf kept on incorporating the newer ideas from the time of Bayazid Bustami's (d. AD 822) 'praise be to me as I am Thay'; to Mansur Hallaj's (d. AD 922) 'I am Truth' and finally, to Shaikh Mohi Uddin Ibn Al Arabi's (d. AD 1240) 'Unity of existentialisms'. Such philosophies tend to approve diversity and plurality in society. Hence, the creed of tasawwuf emerged as extremely relevant for the regions with vast non-Muslim population. The Indian sub-continent was an ideal place for the acceptance, development and the growth of this phenomenon. The Indian sub-continent also had the creed of bhakti as (against / along with gyan), recognized way to reach the Ultimate/Truth. The Jain monks and Buddhist Siddhas along with the strong monastic traditions carried forward the tradition of spirituality. These similarities proved beneficial for the sufis to carry forward their tradition to the newer heights.

Many dialects were spoken from Multan in the north to the Gujarat in the west, down to the Deccan. These dialects were the major vehicle for the transmission of ideas, but not literary languages. The Sufi intervention contributed in the development of these dialects into full-fledged literary languages, especially during the 13th century, when Shaikh Fariduddin Ganj Shakkar (d. 1265), started writing poetry in Multani/Saraiki (incorporated in the Adi Granth by Guru Arjan). Similarly, Amir Khusrau (d. 1325) also wrote in Awadhi dialect. Numerous Chishti Sufi centers were established in various parts of the Subcontinent; the Shaikh at these centers adopted local dialects, used Persian scripts to compile their writings.

An innovative exercise was undertaken by the Chishti Sufis; the genre of premakhyan in line with the Persian Mathnavi tradition was practiced and developed. The characters they have used in their narrations are 'the heroes of certain local caste groups'. This new genre was used to propagate the Islamic-Sufic ideology through the local dialects. Perhaps, it is too obvious to point out that such tradition became extremely popular in the localities like Dalmau, where Mulla Daud (d.1370?) composed Chandayan, using Lorik and Chanda as the main characters of the story, while Malik Mohammad (d.1540) wrote Padmavat at Jais using Padmavati and Ratansen as the main protagonists of his narration. Similarly, we find certain ritualistic forms of Indian traditions, were adopted by the Chishtis; such as making use of the sandal paste and the indigenously developed ceremony of Gagar in their celebrations. The way Sam'a, became an integral part of the Chishti celebrations with traditional musical instruments, irrespective of the ongoing debates on its being permitted/lawful/banned, became a testimony of the pluralistic ethos of the sufis during the last millennium. The paper seeks to discuss some of these issues.'

The Historical Setting

The order of the Chishti Sufis is said to have been organized at the small township of 'Chisht' at Herat (presently in Afghanistan), but traces its origin from the tradition of celebrated Hasan of Basra (d.728). The most important link for the Chishti theorists to argue for the continuation of the spiritual tradition that goes to the Prophet through his cousin and son-in-law, Hazrat 'Ali, the fourth

Caliph of the Rashidun period.¹ For the Chishtis, ‘Ali remains the chief source and the sole repository of all the ‘*Ilm-e Ladduni* (the hidden spiritual knowledge). This order became most widespread Sufi tradition in Northern India from the 13th century onwards. It has often been argued that the rise of this order synchronizes with the establishment of Delhi Sultanate in Northern India. To recapitulate its history quickly: one needs to recall Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti (d. 1235), Khwaja Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki (d. 1236), Baba Shaikh Fariduddin Ganj Shakar (d. 1265) and finally Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya’ (d. 1325) and his numerous disciples made the Chishti order a household name in the entire sub-continent.

It is generally believed that the numerous centers of the Chishti orders were established by the various chief disciples (known as *khalifas*) of Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya, especially in Gujarat, Deccan, Lakhnauti and Pandua in Bengal during the fourteenth century itself. Abul Fazl (d. 1601) mentions about fourteen Sufi orders at the close of sixteenth century with varying degree of catchment areas and pockets of influences.² It is also believed that the Mughal emperors were more inclined towards the Sufi order of the *Naqshbandis* as it was a common perception that the Timurids were closely associated with the Sufi order, belonging to the family of Shaikh Ahmad ‘Ata Yasvi (d. 1166), nick named as *Shah-e Turkistan*. Thereafter, his descendants in the line of Shaikh ‘Obaid Ullah Ahrar (d. 1490), considered the entire Mughals ruling elite, as the family of their disciples. But in no way, this implied a lack of patronage to the other Sufi orders under the Mughals. Hence, some of the Chishti centers particularly *dargah* of Ajmer was a major recipient of the land grants in the form of *waqf*. Similarly, the family of Shaikh Salim Chishti was also a major beneficiary during this time.

It was during the fifteenth century that some of the provincial dynasties have supported the newly established Sufi centers including the Chishtis in a big way. Some of the Sufi orders have evolved their rituals and religious practices incorporating the local traditions and customs in a big way. Some of them were so much ‘*Indianised*’ that an early seventeenth century author of the ‘*Dabistan-I Mazahib*’ places some of the Sufi sects like ‘*Madarian*’ and ‘*Jalalian*’ as a part of the Hindu religious system, totally distinct from Islamic faith and Muslim ways of life. How far this author was justified in his description of these Sufi orders is another question. But the very fact that he has categorized these Sufi sub sects as a part of religious system speaks volumes to which some of the Sufi orders have become *Indianised* and have adopted the local customs and traditions as a part of the religious ritualistic.

We come across similar examples from the Chishti centers. We had the occasion to examine some data from the Upper Gangetic valley, which requires a proper perspective. It has been recorded about the Khanqah of Shaikh Nur Qutb-I Alam (d. 1415) at Paundua in Bengal, that during the *Sama*’ gatherings the *Vishnupadas* (devotional songs from the Vaishnavite tradition) were recited, when it was objected to, the Shaikh is reportedly said to have replied that ‘even Qur’an has the stories of Fir’au, Haman and Namrud. These verses are recited with equal reverence and nobody object to that’. Hence, he seems to have justified the singing of the *Vishnupadas* in the *Sama* gatherings at his Khanqah.³ The other ritualistic adopted at the other centers having affiliation with this tradition are equally important. Similarly, the manner in which the Sufis have made use of the

local dialects, idioms in their writings, poetry and religious discourses do suggest that they were trying to reach to the rural society in a big way. It had the desired impact as well. The rural elite, who were mainly Rajputs, the most war like people, were also making land grants and concessions to the Sufi centers. Hence, the data from this region representing the Chishti tradition needs to be contextualized in the larger framework of agrarian society, landed elite and other features of the then rural society.

The Chishti Sufis in general and particularly of this region have adopted numerous pre-existing norms, cultural traditions, folk stories and yogic practices as a part of their annual ritualistic. Perhaps, it was unique to see some of the best practitioners of various literary genres using Persian *Mathnavi* style, but using the locally popular heroic tales from the places of their adopted homes. For example Malik Muhammad Jaisi (d.1540) describes the tale of Padmavati and Ratansen in an allegorical manner in his famous *Premakhyan*, Padmavat. While in similar manner Mulla Daud (d.1398) took up the folk tale of Lorik and Chanda in his *Chandayan* to elaborate, through the allegorical story, the stages of spiritual love (*Ishq-e Haqiqi* via *Ishaq-e Majazi*). This incorporation of the pre-existing cultural traditions into the Chishti mystic traditions perhaps needed a theoretical justification as well. In this 'new thinking' and the 'process of adjustment', we come across an attempt to predate the history of Sufism to match it with that of the history of Islam.⁴ Hence, Shaikh Husamuddin wal Haq Manikpuri (d.1470) the chief *khalifa* of Shaikh Nur Qutb-e Alam emphatically argued that the earliest Sufi was Prophet Shish and Sufism as a creed existed since the time of the creation i.e. from the time of Hazrat Adam.⁵ The very fact that he has predated the history of *tasawwuf*, conversely, all the existing traditions, idioms which existed in the Indian sub-continent before the arrival of the Turks can also be incorporated in the framework of the Chishti Sufi tradition.⁶

The other important practice which also became a hall mark of the Chishti sufi centers is the ceremony and the procession of *gagar* (lit. small earthen pots, technically referring to the Sufi tradition of carrying water in these small pots for the ritual prayer seeking blessings for the departed souls of the *pirs* of that sufi order) where after the water is sanctified, it is considered as sacred. Such practices are of an indigenous origin; deeply rooted into the local pre-existing *yogic* and *Vaishnava* practices. They could have been incorporated in the Chishti centers only with a theoretical justification to predate the history of *tassawwuf*, and hence to incorporate all the pre-existing norms.⁷

Ritualistic Adoptions by the Chishtis

The interrelationship between the class of the grantees and the dominant caste groups was a purely economic phenomenon where the clash of interest revolved around the question of the appropriation of surplus as well as of the political marginalization. But along with these issues, the questions of sectarian differences, and even within the sect, there were problems of adjustment and accommodation. These differences over the period of time assumed equal importance especially during the late 18th and early 19th century Awadh. The establishment of Nawabi rule in Awadh has definitely given an impetus to the question of *Shi'a* identity and at times the policies of the first three nawabs has often adversely affected the fortunes of the other sects mainly the Sunnis.

These differences apart, there were often problems among the various *silsilah* of the Sufis

and also within the Sunni community esp. after the movement of Saiyid Ahmad of Rae Bareilly (d. 1831) and his paradigm of ‘puritan Islam’ and the tendency of his followers of equating various Sufi practices as *bid‘at* (innovations). We come across some data on these issues as well which needs a proper discussion to understand the problems of accommodation and adjustment amongst the various Sufi orders and the ‘reformists’ criticism that needs a proper analysis.

Adoption of particular customs, rituals and other prevalent practices by Sufi institutions can be shown to have been an ongoing process, especially at places where large landed properties were attached with the Sufi institution by way of *waqf* or *madad-i mash*, more particularly in matters of succession and inheritance⁸. Moreover, in the adoption of rituals and ceremonies observed during public gathering and other solemn occasions, an eclectic attitude was generally displayed, for it was ‘this sphere’ that brought about a sense of belonging among the participants in the event. Such ‘innovative flexibilities’ were aimed at capturing the imagination of the masses and ensured sustained participation for a longer duration as well. The elaborate details of these rituals lent a ‘sanctified halo’ to them while, somehow, a punctual religiosity in their observance created an ‘aura’ around these ceremonies. Apart from the ceremony of *gagar* another ‘Indianised’ ceremony which was popular at the Chishti centers in northern Indian is the practice of sandal. It involves the pouring of Sandalwood paste over the grave of the Shaikh whose death anniversary is being celebrated. Sandalwood is an important substance used by the Indian *yogis* and *sadhuis* in their religious rituals and practices and its paste is said to be a cooling agent. It is also used to relieve irritations and other medicinal purposes. Such a practice is generally adopted by those *khanqahs* which are situated in midst of overwhelming Hindu population.⁹

It should not be assumed that such ‘innovative flexibilities’ met with any approval by the ‘*ulema*’ whose disapproval ranged from mild criticism to an all-out denouncement, often bracketing them with *bidat* (innovations in religion). But the orthodoxy never or seldom targeted the intrusion of local customs in matters of inheritance or succession of the landed properties, confining their attack to the ‘external displays’ popular among the masses. As the class of ‘*ulema*’ too were appealing to popular sentiments in order to win over the same constituency from the hold of the *Sufi* institutions. Their opposition to certain practices and rituals may not have been without some merit, but it is the ability of the *Sufi* institutions to withstand such persistent onslaught from many quarters. The *Sufi* institutions neither thought of abandoning their allegedly ‘un-Islamic’ practices under the pressure of the orthodoxy nor retaining that part of their constituency which was certainly going to the ‘other side’. Here lies the crux of the matter: the Sufi institutions firmly believed that the rituals and rites at the elaborate ceremonial details adopted by them were representatives of their ideological commitment to the philosophy of *Wahdat-ul wujud*, rather than just expediency or catering to popular demand or sentiments.

Sama had been one of the major contentious issues between the Sufis and the orthodoxy in India since the days of Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya (d.1325). Neither had the orthodoxy reconciled itself to the very idea of *Sama* nor did the Chishti Sufis ever give up this practice. They have been using the compositions in the local dialects quite freely even *Vishnupads* were recited at the *khanqah* of Shaikh Noor Qutb e Alam (d.1415), an important Chishti-Nizami *Sufi* at Pandua in

Bengal. This he carried on inspite of the objections of the orthodoxy to which the Shaikh reportedly observed that when the ‘Quran has the verses having description of Namrud and Firaon (Pharoh) and they are recited with equal reverence, why anybody should object to the singing of the *Vishnupads* in my *khanqah*?¹⁰

The traditions inherited and the practices adopted at *khanqah-I Karimia* (a major *sufi* centre at Salon, the present Rae Bareili district) continued to survive in spite of the claims of the biographers of Saiyid Ahmad of Rae Bareili (d. 1831). He was the famous religious reformer who waged a war in the North-Western Provinces (also having an affiliation in the *Naqshbandi* order of the Sufis) for ‘purging of Islam of the innovations (*bid’at*)’. In fact, the ‘religious zeal’ of his biographer/hagiographer prevented him from distinguishing between innovation in religion and adoption of the various practices by the Sufi establishments in tune with the local customs. This inability to differentiate between the two and the failure to appreciate the spirit behind the ceremonies associated with the *khanqah* Salon appear to have caused misunderstanding between Saiyid Ahmad and Shah Muhammad Karim ‘Ata (d.1833), the fourth *sajjada-nashin* of the *khanqah*, as the former’s biographer indicate. He is said to have visited Salon at the time of the annual ‘*urs*’ celebrations and ‘found that during the *Sama*’ gathering, the *murids* indulged in *raqs* (dance) in the state of *wajd* (ecstasy), keeping earthen pots filled with water on their heads. Quite expectedly, Saiyid Ahmad is claimed to have objected to this ceremony as being un-Islamic. If one is to believe his biographer further, ‘Shah Karim ‘Ata is said to have admitted his ‘faults and abandoned the practice altogether’¹¹.

Holding for a while our comments on such a claim, let us first look at the practice referred to. It is a well-known practice in the Chishti Sufi centers known as *gagar* (lit. a small earthen pot) and involves the taking out of a procession from the *khanqah* led by the *sajjada-nashin* who is accompanied by the disciples and musicians. The participants in the procession, carrying empty *gagars* on their heads, walk to the nearby shrine of *Piran-I Paratha* (said to be the companions of legendary martyr Saiyid Salar Mas’ud Ghazi) recite the *fatihah* on water in bigger earthen pots there and with that water fill their *gagars*. The practice is said to have originated during the time of Shaikh Husamul Haq (d. 1470), another Chishti-Nizami *Sufi* of Manikpur. The practice continues at Salon irrespective of the assertion of the biographer of Saiyid Ahmad.

On the other hand, we find that this practice of *gagar* caught the imagination of other contemporaries, who found in it ‘another chance of getting closer to *nur* (‘light’, ‘reality’, or ‘truth’) and a way of attaining *ma’rifat* (gnosis)’. One of them, Shah Kazim (d.1806) the founder of a *khanqah* of Qalandariya order at Kakori paid a number of visits to Salon ‘for the blessings and guidance’ of Shah Karim ‘Ata. The practice of *gagar* at Salon was well known to him as he refers to it in a respectful manner¹²:

*Aye ho Karim Ata kirpa rakh ham par
Ham tose bari Aas Lagae,
Nur sey bhar do gagar hamri
Chunchi gagar ghar jat Lajai
Kazim pai Karim ‘Ata men,
Rabb-i Karim key jyoti samai*

[‘O! Karim ‘Ata, have mercy on me.
I have pinned my hopes on you;
Fill my *gagar* with *nur*,
As I feel embarrassed at taking the empty one to my house;
O! Kazim I see the light of God in Karim ‘Ata.’]
Another poet of a later period has also expressed similar sentiments¹³ :
Ghairat-e saghar-e Jamshed Husami gagar;
Mae ‘Irfan sey hai Labrez ye nami gagar

[The bowl of Jamshed is envious of Husamul Haq’s Gagar;
It is filled with the wine of ‘*Irfan* (gnosis)]

It would be quite unhistorical to think that the reaction of the orthodoxy about the *Sufi* practices and customs they have adopted in various regions was in any way monolithic in nature. On the contrary, we notice substantial differences among them.

This comes out clearly from the description given by another contemporary, Shah ‘Abdur Rahman (d.1850?) of Lucknow, known as *mawahhid* (monotheist), whose description of *tawaid* is considered to be a very stringent indictment of *shirk* (polytheism). In the course of his sojourns to various parts of the country, he visited Salon and stayed with Shah Karim ‘Ata for three months. He found in Salon the tradition of *darveshi* and *sultani* (mendicancy and royalty) occurring side by side and reported that nowhere else except in Salon *khanqah*, were the guests looked after so well. He had reasons to be impressed by Shah Karim ‘Ata because of the way in which he looked after the welfare of the destitute and mendicants at his *khanqah*. He entertained similar hopes for the future also, due to the sophistication, erudition, and scholarship of Maulavi Shah Panah ‘Ata (d.1860), the son and successor of Shah Karim ‘Ata. It appears that unlike the biographer of Saiyid Ahmad, Shah ‘Abdur Rehman was looking for the things of *ta’at-I muta’adi* (man’s obligations towards man), a cardinal principle in the Chishti-Nizami tradition¹⁴.

This is what Donald Butter also emphasizes when he says that Saiyid Ahmad could not gain much in Salon, as he was told by the *zamindars* and the *miyan* (local title for the *sajjada-nashin*) that for them ‘relieving and aiding the poor, the lame and the blind’ was more pious than indulging in holy war. They also told him clearly that they ‘intended to follow the examples of their forefathers in carrying *tazias* (tinsel shrines) at the Muharram.’ In fact, Butter showers some praise on the ‘Muslims of Oudh’ having ‘the religious excitability to range lower than that of their co-religionists in Rohilk’hand in Haidarabad states, or even in Bengal.’

Linguistic Adoptions by the Chishtis

After the establishment of the Turkish rule in the parts of the Indian subcontinent, certain vital changes took place in the cultural life of the people. These dialects were spoken from Multan in the Northern extreme to the Gujarat in the Western extreme down to the Deccan. These dialects were spoken, they were the major vehicle for the transmission of ideas but they were yet to become full-fledged literary languages, as there was no recognized system of script/s. The Sufi intervention somehow made it possible, especially during the 13th century, when Baba Farid (d. 1265), the

famous Chishti Sufi, started writing poetry in Multani/Saraiki (which was later incorporated in the Adi Granth compiled by Guru Arjan Dev). Similarly, Amir Khusrao (d. 1325), is also said to have written some compositions in the Awadhi dialect as well. A number of Chishti-Nizami Sufi centers were established in the various parts of the Indian Subcontinent; the Sufi masters at these centers were adopting local dialects and using Persian scripts to compile the works and poetry.

A major exercise was undertaken by the Chishti Sufis in the area where Awadhi dialect was predominant. The *genre* of *Premakhyan* in line with the Persian *Mathnavi* tradition was practiced by these Sufi poets in Awadhi dialect, who were mainly associated with the Chishti-Nizami tradition of *Sufis* in Awadh. The characters they have used in their poetic narrations are mainly those who were popular in the countryside and were the heroes of certain caste groups. This new *genre* was used to propagate the Islamic-Sufic ideology in the local dialects. Perhaps, it is too obvious to argue that such tradition became extremely popular in the localities like Dalmau, where Mulla Daud (d.1370?) composed *Chandayan*, using Lorik and Chanda as the main characters of the story, while Malik Mohammad (d.1540) wrote *Padmavata* Jais using Padmawati and Ratansen as the main characters of his narration. Similarly, Shah Qasim (d.1731) composed *Hans Jawahir* at Dariyabad following the earlier tradition.

The uses of local dialects for propagation of the Sufi ideas, as well as singing of these compositions at the *sam'a* gatherings were often disapproved by non Chishti Sufis and the Orthodoxy. An incident, attributed by Mulla Nizamuddin (d.1748), the founder of the house of Firangi Mahal to Shaikh Muhammadi (d.1696), confirms this stance in the case of a *Chishti Sufi* institution of Awadh. Shaikh Muhammadi was a well-known *wujudi* scholar of his time and was ideologically associated with the famous Shaikh Muhibullah Allahabadi¹⁵ (d.1648). Mulla Nizamuddin reports the matter as it was reported to Saiyid Abdul Razzaq of Bansa (d. 1724), the famous Qadiri Shaikh:

Once in the *khanqah* of Shaikh Pir Muhammad of Salon (d.1687), *Sama* was in progress and compositions in *Hindvi* [Awadhi?] were being sung. Those present were in the state of ecstasy [*hal*]. Sheikh Muhammadi also reached there. When the *raqs* and the *wajd* of the Sufis was over, he stood up and recited a few Quranic verses in the best of accent, but it had no impact on any of those present; neither *raqs* nor *wajd* overcame them. [Observing this] Shaikh Muhammadi said, 'It is strange that on listening to the Quran none became excited while the compositions in Hindvi, which contradict Quranic themes, get you excited'. Upon hearing this, Saiyid Abdul Razzaq expressed his pleasure and approval of the conduct of Shaikh Muhammadi.¹⁶

While the original narrator of the story remains unnamed, it is highly unlikely for Shaikh Muhammadi, himself a *wujudi*, to have made this comparison between the recitation of Quranic verses and Sufi Awadhi poetry when sung with instruments, for both has different impact on the audience. Hence, the reported incident *per se* becomes secondary. What is more relevant is the way in which it is used by Mulla Nizamuddin, the biographer of Saiyid Abdul Razzaq, and later commentators on this aspect, namely Mulla Qiyamuddin Abdul Bari (d.1926) and Mufti Raza Ansari (d.1990). Irrespective of the fact that they themselves were initiated into the principle of *Qadiri*

and *Naqshbandi* orders respectively, they have compared the *wajd* and *raqs* of Sufis to *tazwir* (simple lies) and *makr wa hila* (hypocrisy). The house of Firangi Mahal, though otherwise known for its catholicity, was unable to let an innocuous incident (which in all likelihood never happened the way it was retold) pass without an adverse comment on the Chishti-Nizami *Sufi* centre of Awadh.¹⁷

The Rajput ‘Agrarian elite’ and the Sufis in the Upper Gangetic Valley

The class of the grantees in the upper Gangetic valley, variously known as *ai’mmadars* or holders of *suyurghal* or *madad e ma’ash* rights represented a very minor segment of the pre-colonial society. Their actual share in the revenue resources of the Mughal Empire was quite negligible (ranged between: 1.5% to 4.5% of the total *ja’ma* of the empire). But in spite of their occupying a marginal space economically, in the resources of the empire, they represented one of the most articulate (and influential) sections of the society. They were involved in the dissemination of knowledge and often defined the norms of high culture in the society. Their literary contributions were not confined only to Arabic and Persian, but extended to the new dialects and literary genres like the use of *Awadhi* and the *Premakhyan* literary traditions. It was these intellectual elite that led the state to formulate policies in order to promote their interests and also sometimes to curb their interest. Though it will be rather out of place to mention here, it is worthwhile to recall that the colonial policies towards the *ma’afidars* were also aimed at controlling this class, and this could also explain their participation in a large number during the great uprising of 1857.

Another important feature of the region was its caste structure which dominated the agrarian society and controlled the agrarian surplus. There were tensions between the dominant *zamindari* castes and the revenue grantees relating to trivial issues, often leading to extreme unpleasantness. We come across a number of petitions (*mahzar*) by the grantees to the provincial authorities or for the redressal of their grievances of the alleged high handedness of the ruling elites. It appears that an intervention by the authorities was enough and the things became smooth thereafter. The clashes in the agrarian society between the dominant rural elite of the area and the newly inducted class of the grantees were mainly to control the flow of the surplus and the prime land in the village. In no way these clashes could be termed as ‘local battles between the Hindus and the Muslims’ or ‘the communal land wars’...and in no way ‘the form of these land wars was often a savage attacks by the totality of the rural society against the small town headquarters of the Muslim gentry’. Similarly, these clashes cannot be described as ‘straight forward pieces of communal savagery’.¹⁸

One should remember that such ‘clashes’ were mainly confined to certain areas/regions, which have acquired considerable notoriety for the recalcitrant attitude of their *zamindar*.¹⁹ While, some ‘empirical’ data has been provided and it has been finally argued (though it is difficult to make out what argument is being made) that in the late 17th and early 18th century Awadh, the ‘community consciousness often prevailed to blur the other identities’ at the same time adding that ‘society was not always divided strictly on community lines even in times of conflict’. It has also been argued that ‘there was no homogenous Hindu community, the followers of Islam entertained diverse notions of piety and spirituality’. On the basis of hagiographic records and the ‘miraculous tales’, glowing tribute is paid to a ‘Qadiri Sufi in Bansa in Awadh [to have] experience[ed] divinity in a Hindu

ensemble with Hindu Bairagis', and finally it is concluded that all this, in no way, 'underrate the fact that *Wahdat ul wujud* remained generally the most acceptable sufi doctrine in Awadh in our period.'²⁰

Undoubtedly this region was the abode of the various Rajput clans who dominated the agrarian economy of the region and they, due to their very strong caste ties, had full sway over the surplus generating segment of the agrarian society. The new Muslim intellectual elite, the service gentry and the *sufis* were given land grants in this area only; often there were problems between the grantees and superior right holders over possessing the prime land or the preferred plot in the village. Some of these problems were solved by simple change in the area of the grant by the local administration itself but on occasions, the tension assumed ugly dimensions leading to open hostility and even armed conflict.

At the same time one should not ignore that numerous land grants conferred by the imperial *farmans* invariably has a citation that the area of the grant was already settled by the local chieftains and the grantees were already in possession of the land. The imperial *farmans* were obtained to safeguard the interest of the grantees in future²¹ and one should not overlook the fact the even if a grant of some villages was made by ejecting the earlier owners from those villages, no attempt was ever made by those owners to take back the possession of those villages forcibly after the weakening of the provincial or central authority. The grantees enjoyed the uninterrupted possession of such villages till the UP Zamindari Abolition and Land Reform Act of 1952 was implemented²².

There appear to have been substantial conditions with *madad-e ma'ash* grants, in the beginning; later on these were dropped altogether and the grantees themselves were elevated to the status of the 'Army of the Prayer'. Still we find that the successive Mughal rulers insisted on confirmatory orders after the death of the original grantees. In matters of inheritance to grantees, the rules of *shariat* were not applicable as *madad-i ma'ash* was now described in the official chancellery as an article on loan ('*ariyat*'), hence separate regulations were devised to regulate the succession and inheritance in the property of the grantees.²³

The manner in which the local chieftains bestowed favors upon the *Sufis* and the institutions having mystics predilections can be culled from the *wajib al arz* documents prepared during the course of the First Regular Settlements (*band o-bast awwal*) of the province of Awadh after the events of AD 1857. These papers recorded the past history of the village; the detailed information regarding the previous ownership, the history of families and clans of the various regions was arranged and incorporated in these reports.

A few *wajib al arz* of the villages included in the *ma'afi* of the Salon family of the grantees are available. A perusal of these records gives us some idea of the favors bestowed on them by these chiefs.

- a) Village Dhankesara, *pargana* Parshadepur, and village Barwaliya, *pargana* Salon was in the estate of Raja Balbhadra Singh, the Kanphria chief of Tiloin. He had donated the revenues of these villages in favor of Shah Pir 'Ata, so that he may be able to meet the expenses incurred in feeding of mendicants, destitute and the visitors to his *khanqah*. Since till F1174/AD1763 the grantees held the possession of the villages on the strength

of the *sanad* of the Raja; thereafter in F 1175/ AD 1764 the imperial *farman* of Shah Alam II included these villages also in the grant of the grantees.

- b) The Raja of *talluqa* Bhadri, *pargana* Behar has allotted two tracts of forest land to Shah Muhammad Panah. The grantee got the forest cleared and settled the area with the peasant castes especially the *kurmis*. One tract was named Panah Nagar and another Hayat Nagar (after his deceased brother Shah Muhammad Hayat).

The existence of numerous villages and *chaks* having the nomenclatures similar to the names of the family members of the mystic establishment in *pargana* Salon, district Rae Bareli (UP) and *pargana* Kunda, district Pratapgarh, suggest that many tracts of forest land have had a similar history and that these areas were also cleared by the grantees/their agents to settle the population and extend the area under cultivation and hence to raise their income.²⁴

There appear to have been substantial conditions with *madad-e ma'ash* grants, in the beginning; later on these were dropped altogether and the grantees themselves were elevated to the status of the 'Army of the Prayer'. Still we find that the successive Mughal rulers insisted on confirmatory orders after the death of the original grantees. In matters of inheritance to grantees, the rules of *shariat* were not applicable as *madad-ima'ash* was now described in the official chancellery as an article on loan ('*ariyat*'), hence separate regulations were devised to regulate the succession and inheritance in the property of the grantees.²⁵

The total amount of the *jama* alienated through such grants in 1598 was only 5.72% of the total *naqdi* in *suba* Awadh. But the fact that the *madad-I ma'ash* grants as a rule were made out of the cultivable waste with the implicit purpose of making it cultivable; the standard formula used invariably in such orders was *zamin-I uftada laiq-I zairaat kharij az jama*'; at the most 1/3 of the total and at the later stage 1/2 of the total grant was out of the cultivated land (*mazru'*)²⁶. It is to be remembered that the *suyurghal* figures of the *Ain-I Akbari* represent only the loss of revenue to the state through such alienations, and not the actual income from *madad-I ma'ash* lands. It might have included the amount distributed through cash allowances, but this is not clear. Holders of the *madad- I ma'ash* rights *per se* posed no threat to the dominant elite of the area; neither could they ever claim any fiscal perquisites belonging to the *zamindar*²⁷.

The revenue grantees without any position in the official hierarchy posed no threat to the dominant elite of the area; neither could they ever claim any fiscal perquisite belonging to the *zamindars*. The resistance to the induction of the grantees from outside by the local elements generally centered around the questions like not relinquishing the cultivated land in any *zortalab* areas, refusal by the peasants/*zamindars* to pay the land revenue. A quick solution of these matters even by the local officials could greatly help the grantees. Often a change in the area of the grant was made in the same village or the *pargana* under the usual administrative procedure. So the acquisition/possession/retention of the prime land in the village and a guaranteed uninterrupted flow of the revenues to the grantees were the major factors of tension and conflict within the agrarian society, but they were kept within the manageable administrative limits and such questions would have seldom caused any major law and order problems.

Conflicts/Clash in the Agrarian Society

We find that most of the state functionaries, particularly the ecclesiastical officers were holders of revenue-grants in lieu of their pay claims. These grants were generally concentrated in particular villages. Often the induction of these outsiders as co-sharers of the social surplus in the agrarian society was resented by the *zamindar*. But their 'reservations' mostly related to trivial matters, which could be solved by the local officials.

An attempt is made here to examine some fresh evidence of the tension and conflict between the revenue-grantee and the *zamindar* as well as the elements of co-operation between the two classes. Since the genesis of these conflicts lay in the distribution of social surplus, the conflict often cut across religious lines.

But things assumed alarming dimensions when these revenue grantees happened to be the holders of ecclesiastical offices as well. Since such officers had a close proximity to the officials at the centre and they had to perform many unpopular duties in the region, they could become easy targets of recalcitrant *zamindars*. These *zamindars* often thought of expelling such people from the area of their control.

A statement of the facts presented by the *qazi* family in the *faujdari* jurisdiction of Baiswara in the year AD 1662 sets the context of conflict unambiguously. It describes the situation obtaining there as follows:

The region of Baiswara happens to be abode of infidelity, and all the twenty-one *pargana* are the home of refuge of the Bais people. Out of these, six *parganas* (Asoha, Harha, Dalmau, Moranwan, Sainpur and Ranbirpur) have *qazis*, whereas fifteen *parganas* have neither *qazis* nor mosques, nor do arrangements exist either for the *azan* (call for prayer) or for the congregational prayers. The fact that our ancestors exercised jurisdictions as *qazi* over all the twenty one *parganas* earlier, that there had been ongoing clashes between our ancestors and the Bais Rajputs, this way eighty years had passed, consequently *qazis* lost their jurisdiction ('*amal*') from 15 *parganas*. None has cared so far, to eradicate the sources of infidelity; therefore the petitioner, Qazi Maudad, deemed it necessary to report the matter to the Emperor Aurangzeb.²⁸

Not only the holders of the ecclesiastical offices were subjected to the *zamindars* wrath, but also the peasants residing in the villages of their *madad-I ma'ash* were terrorized by the tumultuous *zamindars* when they were out to settle scores with these officers. Cattle, the prized possession of the peasantry, often attracted them, and villages were raided to lift livestock.

A petition from the family of the *qazi* from *pargana* Parsadepur in the year AH 1061/ AD 1652 complains of the raid in their *madad-I ma'ash* villages by *kanhpuria* Rajputs of *pargana* Salon.

They raided the *madad-I ma'ash* villages of the petitioners with a large number of their clansmen and carried away 940 oxen and buffaloes from the villages of Saleempur and Nizampur. This act was committed without there being any justification and with such impunity that, "they wounded even those two persons who had informed

the Emperor of their misdeeds. The infidels are perpetuating such acts of oppression against the Muslims'²⁹

The example of such clashes could be multiplied, but it should not be assumed that the grantees holding ecclesiastical offices could be dislodged in this way from any region. They got protection from the Emperor in case of such clashes. There are instances, too numerous to be cited, when imperial *farmans* were issued to award exemplary punishment to the guilty in case of any loss sustained by the grantees.

Conclusion

Thus, the above analyses of only some data from the Chishti Sufi centers in the upper Gangetic valley shows that these centers continued to be the standing samples of a shared past. It also appears that in developing such a pluralistic ethos, the opposition seems to have emanated from within the Sufi circles and in this case mainly from those who adhere to the Qadri and Naqshbandi traditions. Incidentally, the rural elite (often described as *zortalab*) seem to have shown greater understanding and maturity in cases of these Sufi centers for having an eclectic ideology. While a hostile administration could lead to only minor aberration. Perhaps it was due to the eclectic tendencies of the region that, it seems, that the people have shown little enthusiasm for the radical and puritan ideology of Saiyid Ahmad of Rae Bareilly, as the contemporary British official says that, ' *the religious excitability of the Muslim of Oudh seems to range lower than that of their co-religionists in Rohilkhand in the Haidrabad states, or even in Bengal*'³⁰ perhaps it was this legacy that the people jointly fought in the end during the great catastrophe of 1857. Much water has flown the Ganges over the centuries, but the legacy, memory the Chishti centers survives in a big way in spite of the best efforts of the various radical organizations.

References and Notes :

- 1 It is important to mention here that the Chishti position on the issue has been contested and almost denied by the *shi'a* theorists, who deny any possibility of 'the Secret Knowledge' or '*irfan*' being passed on to anybody other than in the chain of Twelve/Seven *Imams* and hence, the *shi'a* over the period of time have rejected *tasawwuf* as a system. On the other hand, the Naqshbandi order of the Sufis (erstwhile known as *Silsila-I khwajgan* of Turkistan) also developed a theory and philosophy which was at great variance with the Sufis of Khurasan. Hence, it emerged as the only Sufi order within a typical 'Sunni garb'. Therefore, for them the repository of hidden knowledge was the first Caliph Hazrat Abu Bakr and not Hazrat 'Ali. This tradition was carried forward in India by no less a person than Shah Wali Ullah (d. 1763) who went to the extent of questioning the *liqa* (the spiritual initiation) of Hasan Basri with Hazrat 'Ali. This way, he questioned the very basis of Chishti theory and practice over the millennium. The chief source of information for the Chishti is of course Amir Khurd Kirmani's *Siyar ul Auliya*, compiled some times during the latter half of the fourteenth century. A lithograph edition was published in the 19th century from Delhi by Chiranjilal in 1862. However, a critical edition of this text will greatly help the scholars.
2. K.A.Nizami, 'Some Aspects of Religion and Politics in India during the Thirteenth Century', 2009 (reprint), *Idarah-i Adbiyat-i Delli*, p.174; see also his *Tarikh-e Mashaikh –e Chisht*, for the elaboration of this argument.
3. Shaikh Mohammad Ikram, '*Rud-I kauthar*' (Urdu), New Delhi: Nahid Offset Press, 1991 (reprint) p. 498. The author has not quoted any source for this specific information.

4. Islam is often described as *Din-e Ibrahim* with the understanding that the basic framework of the religion were founded at the time of the Prophet Hazrat Ibrahim (Abraham of Judaic tradition) and it was the same divine law which was propagated then and again by the Prophets like Moses and Jesus, but later on their followers 'corrupted their original teachings and introduced numerous innovations'. Therefore, Prophet Mohammad came with the new scripture, Quran; hence the new *shariat* is, in fact the 'pristine form of law' from the time of Prophet Ibrahim. This way, Islam claims to have become the true and the only 'inheritor' of all the earlier religious traditions propagated/brought by the Semitic Prophets.
5. Shaikh Husam-al Haque WA Din, in *Anis-ul'Ashiqin* has discussed the question in four sections. Section one begins with such diverse issues as about the origin of the creed of *tasawwuf*; the earliest Sufi with whom the concept of *khirqah* is associated; on the notion of 'ishq (love) and the definition of 'ashiq. Here, while taking a note of the different sayings he shows a clear preference for the opinion that Prophet Shish happens to be the earliest Sufi. *Anis-ul'Ashiqin*, Ms. ff 2a-4a, Subhanullah Collection, Maulana Azad Library, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh.
6. For an earlier version of this argument see my 'Sufi Tradition and Popular literature: Chishti ideology, Awadhi dialect and local practices', in *Popular literature in pre- Modern Societies in South Asia*, ed. Surinder Singh and Ishwar Dayal Gaur, Pearson, Delhi 2008 pp.271-280 (for this reference see p.272)
7. For a discussion on some of these aspects see Claudia Lebeskiend, *Piety on its Knees: Three Sufi Traditions in South Asia in Modern Times*, OUP, Delhi, 1998, pp.152-53& 256-59
8. *Rawaj-I a'am of pargana* Parshadepur, Tehsil Salon, District Pratapgarh, included in the *Jild-i band wa bast-I awwal* (First vol. of the revenue settlements) of 1860, recording among other things, the *Kayfiyyat-I abadi wa husul-I milkiyyat* (the details of the settlement and the Acquisition of the Superior Land Rights).
9. For a discussion on this ritual see Claudia Lebeskiend, *Piety on its Knees: Three Sufi Traditions in South Asia in Modern Times*, OUP, New Delhi, 1998, pp. 152-153
10. See, Shaikh Mohammad Ikram, *Rud-I kauthar*, (1991 reprint, Delhi), p. 498.
11. The only authority for such story is Saiyid Muhammad Ali's, *Makhzan-I Ahmadi*, f.56 (compiled in AD 1865). This story is repeated uncritically by Ghulam Rasul Mehr in his *Saiyid Ahmad Shahid*, Lahore, 1954, pp. 155-6. However, Saiyid Abul Hasan 'Ali Nadwi in *Sirat-I Saiyid Ahmad Shahid*, 2 vols, Nadwatul 'Ulema', Lucknow, 1939, has simply omitted the incident without any comment.
12. Shah Kazim Qalandar (d. AD 1806), *Sant Ras or Naghmatul Asrar*, Awadhi text edited with introduction, notes and translation in Urdu by Shah Mujtaba Haidar, Lucknow, AH 1376, pp.72-3; doha nos. 484-9 (the numbering of the dohas in continuous). However, the editor tells us in the notes things which are quite different from what Shah Kazim himself says, besides making a factual error by stating that Shah Kazim has alluded to the blessing of the four *pirs* of Salon for overcoming his difficulties'. Hence, they ought to be Sheikh Pir Muhammad, Sheikh Pir Ashraf, Sheikh Pir 'Ata, and Sheikh Pir Panah, instead of what we are told by the editor.
13. A lesser-known poet of Salon, Ishtiyah Ahmad Mushtaq, has composed a poem on the *gagar* procession. This is included in his collection, *Bagh-I Naim*, MS (compiled in AH 1350).
14. The *malfizat* of Shah Abdur Rehman were compiled by Maulavi Nurullah as *Anwarul Rehman Letanwirul Jinan*, Lucknow Kali Prasad, Press, AH 1270, the details on his visit to Salon are on p. 33.
15. Shaikh Mohammadi's fame is attributed to his courage in defending, in front of Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb, (d.1701), the allegedly controversial points from the famous book *Al-Taswiya*, authored by his pir Shaikh Muhibullah of Allahabad.

16. Mulla Nizamuddin Ansari, *Manaqib-I Razzaqia*, Lucknow, AH 1313, pp. 14-15 see also Muhammad Raza Ansari, *Tazkira Hazrat Saiyid Saheb Banswi*, Lucknow, 1986, pp.70-71.
17. See my, 'Religious Plurality in the Chishti Tradition: A Case Study of the *Khanqahat* Salon in Awadh' in Jamal Malik and Helmut Reifeld, *Religious Pluralism in South Asia And Europe*, OUP, New Delhi 2005, pp. 219-244, for the specific reference see, pp. 233-234.
18. Bayly, C A, 'The Pre-history of 'Communalism'? Religious Conflict in India, 1700-1860', *Modern Asian Studies*, 19, 2 (1985), pp. 177-20; it is interesting to note that all his references are from the published calendar of the Allahabad document and not from the original or it's facsimile.
19. For further details see Zahiruddin Malik, 'Problems of *faujdari* jurisdiction in Baiswara; *PIHC*, vol. I 1973, pp. 211-15
20. See Muzaaffar Alam, 'Assimilations from a Distance: Confrontation and Sufi Accommodation in Awadh Society' in R. Champakalakshmi & S.Gopal (eds.) *Tradition, Dissent and Ideology: Essays in Honor of Romila Thapar*, OUP, New Delhi, 2001, pp. 164-191; While paying tribute to Saiyid Abdul Razzaq of Bansa (d.1724), the Qadiri sufi, he ignores the contrary evidence, which is being discussed in one of the sections below.
21. For example, the large Sufi establishment in the southern Awadh, namely *khanqah-e karimiya* at Salon was a recipient of the imperial favors since 19th RY/H. 1086 (A.D. 1676) of Emperor Aurangzeb till the 6th RY/1764 of Emperor Shah Alam II. All the imperial *farmans* have a citation that the grantees were already in possession of the land granted by the local officials and the chieftains. The imperial *farman* was issued only to safeguard the future interest of the grantees. For the details and translations of all the imperial *farman* issued to the family see my, A Sufi institution of Awadh, in *Ideology and Society: Essays in honor of Prof. R S Sharma*, (ed.) D N Jha, Delhi, 1996 pp. 269-89.
22. W H Sleeman while undertaking journey through the kingdom of Awadh in Feb. 1849, he refers to this [Khanqah-I Karimiya] 'eleemosynary endowment was granted twelve villages rent free in perpetuity...by ousting Kunpuriya Rajputs for...contumacy or rebellion' but this *khanqah* continued to enjoy the *ma'afi grants* of all the villages till 1952. It appears strange that the Kunpuriya Rajputs, who dominated the area and were known for their notoriety, have never tried to reoccupy the villages from where they were said to have been ousted. See: *Sleeman in Oudh*, ed. P D Reeves, Cambridge, 1971, pp.128-9.
23. Different set of rules of succession were formulated by Aurangzeb in relation to the revenue grants, as it was asserted that, 'since *madad-ima'ash* is an '*ariyat* (loan), therefore in such matters, the exalted order is sufficient'. By invoking this principle, the new regulations enforced rules different from the *shari'at* law of succession. The *farman* of Aurangzeb issued in 35th RY/AD 1690. It was through this order that the *madad-I ma'ash* were made hereditary and different set of rules were framed for deciding the share of an individual in the property of the deceased grantee, accession no. 1880, Regional Records Office, UP State Archives, Allahabad.
24. Thus, we have the villages like, Khwajapur, Muhammadabad, Ashrafganj, Atanagar, Ataganj Usri, Piranagar, Panahnagar, *Chak* Karimnagar, Mohaddi Nagar in the block and *tehsil* Salon, district Rae Breilly; in the block Kara district Allahabad, we have villages named as Afzalpur Saton, Nizam Mai, Pura Mohammad Saeed and in block and *pargana* Kunda, district Pratapgarh some villages are known as Ashrafganj, Pir Ataganj, Karimnagar, Panahnagar and Hyatnagar etc.
25. Different set of rules of succession were formulated by Aurangzeb in relation to the revenue grants, as it was asserted that, 'since *madad-I ma'ash* is an '*ariyat* (loan), therefore in such matters, the exalted order is sufficient'. By invoking this principle, the new regulations enforced rules different from the *Shariyat* law of succession. The *farman* of Aurangzeb issued in 35th RY/AD 1690. It was through this

order that the *madad-I ma'ash* were made hereditary and different set of rules were framed for deciding the share of an individual in the property of the deceased grantee, accession no. 1880, Regional Records Office, UP State Archives, Allahabad.

26. Irfan Habib, *Agrarian System of Mughal India*, (1963) p. 302 and notes.
27. It was only with the increasing monetization of the proprietary rights during the 17th century, that the grantees could purchase such rights and could become *ijaradars*. In *pargana* Hisampur, *sarkar* Bahraich, see the example of Saiyid Muhammad Arif, who was originally a revenue grantee, and made a considerable fortune. (Irfan Habib, *op. cit.*, pp.150-52)
28. *NAI/2618/6*. This representation has as many as six seals of high officials, two of them of the *jagirdar*. It uses the word *ta'alluqa*, which appears to be the earliest reference to this institution in the proper context. Apart from this, topographical details have also been provided. The length of the *faujdari* of Baiswara *nizamat* in the east-west direction between *pargana* Dalmau and Harha was 25 *karoh*, the width in the south-north, lying between river Ganges and the bank of Sai river, was 15 *karohs*. Also the names of all six *parganas* under the jurisdiction of the *Qazis* as well as of the 15 *pargana* from where they have been expelled are given.
29. Abdul Qadir Collection (document no. 4); U.P. State Archives, Lucknow, This petition has seven seals; three of them of the *jagirdars* of the area; and fourteen signatures (five of them in Devanagari script). It is dated 3rd Jamad AH 1061/A.D.1652
30. Donald Butter, *op.cit.*

