Review Essay

Islam and Sufism in South Asia: Dynamics of the Chishtī Sufi Order

SAKIR HOSSAIN LASKAR[*]

Abstract

In his Lovers of God: Sufism and the Politics of Islam in Medieval India*, Raziuddin Aquil studied the role of Sufis in preaching Islam in medieval South Asia. He saw the preaching of Islam in South Asia as a gradual process. Many Sufi orders preached Islam in South Asia from medieval times. Among these Sufi orders, the Chishtī order caught the attention of many scholars of Islamics. Carl W. Ernst and Bruce B. Lawrence also penned a highly acclaimed work* Sufi Martyrs of Love: Chishti Sufism in South Asia and Beyond*. While Aquil detailed various practices of the Chishtī order and Chishtī saints' role in various socio-political events that took place in the Delhi Sultanate, Ernst and Lawrence elaborated on the origin, development, practices, and concepts of the Chishtī order. Unlike Aquil, Ernst and Lawrence continued describing the history of the Chishtī order up to the twenty-first century. The purpose of this review essay is to compare and assess these two works with the help of primary and secondary sources.*

Keywords

Chishtī, Sufi order, India, Aquil, Ernst, Lawrence.

Introduction

The expansion of Islam was not the result of the Turkish conquest of India nor was it caused by the orthodox approach of conversion adopted by the *'ulamā'*. In his *Lovers of God*,[1] Raziuddin Aquil attributed the rapid spread of Islam in the Indian subcontinent to the innovative approach taken by Sufi

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[*] MA Student of Medieval Indian History, Centre of Advanced Study, Department of History, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, India.

[1] Raziuddin Aquil, *Lovers of God: Sufism and the Politics of Islam in Medieval India* (London: Routledge, 2020).

masters. Sufi masters tirelessly worked for the spread of Islam in India and the emancipation of its people regardless of their religion, caste, creed, or social status. They lived among the people and spoke their dialects. Thus, they helped people preserve their culture and become part of Islam simultaneously.[2] Aquil mostly discussed the impact of Chishtī Sufis' ideology on medieval South Asian society, especially during the Delhi Sultanate period.

In their *Sufi Martyrs of Love*,[3] Carl Ernst and Bruce Lawrence aimed to analyse the history of the Chishtī Sufi order from its inception to its establishment and flourishment in South Asia. They avoided "taking the rhetoric of decline as the criterion of Sufi viability"[4] and discussed the deviation from the original Chishtī ideals which happened to every generation of Chishtī saints. They criticized the notion of present-mindedness which projects "a historical spectrum of advance and progress for which the West is the only engine"[5] and denies the validity of Sufism.

After going through the work of Aquil and that of Ernst and Lawrence, one observes that they mostly deal with similar themes though their approaches differ. One also notices that while Aquil's work mainly focused on the Chishtī saints of the Delhi Sultanate with exception of the last chapter in which he discussed the work of a modern Muslim intellectual Sayyid Ṣabāḥ al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥmān, Ernst and Lawrence studied the Chishtī order and its prominent saints from the earliest time to the modern days. This review essay aims to analyse both of these books with special reference to the establishment of the Chishtī order and its continuation to modern times and Chishtī saints' relations and attitudes towards medieval regimes of South Asia, especially the Delhi Sultanate.

The Chishtī Sufi Order: Beginning, Ancestry, and Continuation

In his *The Sufi Orders in Islam,* Trimingham notes that Sufism first started as an individual belief and from the twelfth century CE onwards a system of Sufi orders started to take root, which means that the Sufi masters and their disciples organised themselves in a neatly connected organization. He also notes that from this phase the decline of Sufism started.[6] However,

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[2] Ibid., 16.

[3] Carl W. Ernst and Bruce B. Lawrence, *Sufi Martyrs of Love: Chishti Sufism in South Asia and Beyond* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

[4] Ibid., 7.

[5] Ibid., 8.

[6] John S. Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), 70-71.

Ernst and Lawrence disagree with Trimingham on this point. According to them, Sufism did not decline in one phase, rather it was a cyclical process[7] and the situation was a paradoxical one. The Chishtī Sufis were aware of this paradox. To support their view, Ernst and Lawrence note that even the earliest Sufi masters observed that the true version of Sufism did not exist in their time.

Unlike other Sufi orders, the Chishtī order did not bear the name of its patron saints, rather it identified itself with a particular place, Chisht, a place not far from Herat of modern Afghanistan.[8] Ernst and Lawrence mention five cycles of the Chishtī order through which the Chishtīs flourished in South Asia and beyond. They identify the first cycle as the establishment of the order by Abū Isḥāq al-Shāmī (d. 940 CE) in the tenth century CE, the first master who stayed at Chisht. The next cycle ranged from the tenth century to the twelfth century CE. The third cycle of the Chishtī order started from the Shaykh Muʿīn al-Dīn Chishtī's arrival at Ajmer (India) in the twelfth century CE and it continued up to the fourteenth century. The Chishtī order flourished in this cycle with the help of famous saints like Quṭb al-Dīn Bakhtiyār Kākī, Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyāʾ, Narṣīr al-Dīn Chirāgh-i Dihlī, and others. The fourth cycle which can be placed between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries was marked by the spread of the Chishtī order to the farthest corners of South Asia by the disciples and successors of Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyāʾ. The Chishtī order was also divided into various sub-lineages during this cycle. The last cycle which ranges from the eighteenth century to the modern day is marked by the decline of Islamic rule and the establishment of colonial rule, independence and partition of British India, and the Chishtī order's struggle to cope with the situation.[9]

The Chishtī pantheistic concept was based on Ibn ʿArabī's theory of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (the unity of being). The core idea of this concept is that everything is Allah's manifestation. However, to understand divinity one has to grade everything according to its importance. Even the teachings of the prophets must be graded because the teachings of all prophets do not bear the same importance. The notion is equally true regarding the teachings of saints. Ernst and Lawrence note that "knowledge is to be esteemed, and those who attain it are highly esteemed, but sins are not forgiven unless one goes beyond esteem, and loves both knowledge and

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[7] Ernst and Lawrence, *Sufi Martyrs of Love*, 12.
[8] Ibid., 19.
[9] Ibid., 14.

the knowledge specialists."[10] The Chishtī saints believe that one must immerse himself in knowledge. In Sufi terms, this process is called *fanā* (annihilation of one's self). *Fanā* requires an extreme urge to be united with one's creator. It is love which leads one to the path of annihilation by the destruction of one's soul. After *fanā,* one would attain divine restoration or permanence (*baqā*), and this permanence will be without comfort, cure, and medicine.[11]

Ernst and Lawrence note that by linking themselves with their spiritual masters and tracing their lineage to the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him), the Sufis tried to "conjure a spiritual line that links the current generation to earlier generations."[12] Therefore, it is necessary to learn the complete genealogy of a Sufi order to understand its ideals. The first work of this genre is *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyyah* of Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (d. 1021 CE) but it was 'Abd Allāh al-Anṣārī al-Harawī (d. 1089 CE) who first included Persian-speaking saints in the extended version of *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyyah*. 'Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī (d. 1492 CE) again enlarged al-Anṣārī's version in his *Nafaḥāt al-Uns.* The inclusion of Indian saints was started by a Suhrawardī saint Muḥammad Jamālī (d. 942/1536) in his *Siyar al-'Ārifīn*, in which he recorded the biographies of thirteen Chishtī and Suhrawardī saints. The next job was taken by the Mughal prince Dārā Shikōh (d. 1659). In his *Safīnat al-Awliyā'*, Dārā provided biographical accounts of 400 major Indian and non-Indian saints. Ernst and Lawrence note that Dārā was trying to link only Qādirī saints to the genealogy of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him), while at the same time he was trying to establish 'Abd al-Qādir Jīlānī (d. 561/1077) as the foremost Sufi exemplar and the Qādirī order as the paramount Sufi brotherhood.[13] However, this kind of tendency can also be noticed in the works of Chishtī scholars.[14]

Ernst and Lawrence utilized many primary works of Sufi literature. However, they ignored or did not properly use some important Sufi works. An important category of Sufi literature is the *malfūẓāt* (recorded conversations) of Sufi masters like *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād*, which contains the *malfūẓāt* of Niẓām al-Dīn 'Awliyā'. These *malfūẓāt* provide detailed accounts of the Sufi saints' careers. The *tadhkirah*s or hagiographies, which were usually compiled after the death of the saints, often suffer

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[10] Ibid., 15.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid., 47.

[13] Ibid., 51.

[14] Ibid., 58.

from the authors' desire to extol their masters' status. Ernst and Lawrence considered *Siyar al-Awliyā'* of Amīr Khurd the only biography of Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā', which was compiled in the middle of the fourteenth century CE and mostly ignored his other biographies. They also did not use some early biographies of Chishtī saints, such as the earliest biography of Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā' *Qiwām al-'Aqā'id*, which was written after only twenty-five years of the saint's death. Moreover, Ernst and Lawrence wrongly referred to *Asrār al-Awliyā'* as the *malfūẓāt* of Mu'īn al-Dīn Chishtī compiled by Quṭb al-Dīn Bakhtiyār Kākī, which, in reality, were the *malfūẓāt* of Shaykh Farīd al-Dīn Ganj-i Shakar compiled by Badr al-Dīn Isḥāq. Ernst and Lawrence consider *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād* the earliest Chishtī *malfūẓāt*, which is not true. Before the compilation of *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād*, *Miftāḥ al-Ṭālibīn*, which contains the discourses of Quṭb al-Dīn Bakhtiyār Kākī, was compiled by one of his disciples Khiḍr Mu'īn. Lawrence mentioned *Miftāḥ al-Ṭālibīn* in an earlier work of his.[15] Moreover, contemporary court literature (i.e., court chronicles, *inshā* literature, and *mathnavīs*) needs to be assessed to get a clear image of medieval Chishtī saints' activities. Regional Chishtī saints from Bengal and Deccan also left a very rich literary history in the form of *malfūẓāt* and *maktūbāt* (letters). *Malfūẓāt* of Burhān al-Dīn Gharīb provide important information on Sufism in Deccan during the fourteenth century CE. The writings of Bandahnavāz Gaisūdarāz, who settled in Deccan, also need to be reassessed. For the Bihar region, the works of Firdausī saints can be very fruitful.

While Aquil assessed only the Chishtī saints of medieval India, Ernst and Lawrence went further to provide a detailed account of colonial and modern Chishtī masters. To understand these cycles of Chishtī order, one has to understand the prevalent socio-political situation of the period where the meaning of "decline and revival, innovation and reform, heresy and orthodoxy" changed significantly by the creation of three modern states, i.e., India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.[16] The nineteenth century was marked by the activities of two major sub-branches of the Chishtī order (i.e., the Ṣābirī branch and Niẓāmī branch) to survive and continue their traditions during British rule. The division in the Chishtī order can be understood with the analysis of Liaqat Moini who states that the divide can be explained by the divine qualities of saints and the shrines of both

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[15] Bruce B. Lawrence, *Notes from a Distant Flute: Sufi Literature in Pre-Mughal India* (Tehran: Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1978), 96.

[16] Ernst and Lawrence, *Sufi Martyrs of Love*, 106.

sub-branches. While the Ṣābirī shrine of Kalyar manifests divine majesty (*jalāl*), the Ajmer of the Niẓāmī branch manifests divine beauty (*jamāl*).[17]

While describing the life of Chishtī saints from colonial times, Ernst and Lawrence highlight how colonial Chishtīs deviated from the earlier Chishtī paths of not being concerned with political matters.[18] However, Aquil's work shows that Ernst and Lawrence somehow ignored the incidents where Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyāʾ sent his deputies to participate in political campaigns. Moreover, the Chishtī literature mentions that Muʿīn al-Dīn Chishtī made the Ghurid conquest in India possible. Later Chishtīs also participated in politics. Nūr Quṭb-i ʿĀlam and Abd al-Quddūs Gangōhī were two famous examples of that phase. In the last chapter of their work, Ernst and Lawrence highlight the works of modern Chishtī masters-cum-scholars like Wahid Baksh Sial Rabbani, Inayat Khan and others and their responses to the challenges of modern times. Modern Chishtī scholars adapted modern technologies such as printing, audio recording, video recording, films, TV programmes, and the Internet.

Sultans, Nobles and Chishtī Masters

Due to their belief in *waḥdat al-wujūd*, the Chishtīs were always at loggerheads with the orthodox *ʿulamā* of the Sunni Ḥanafī school and also with other Sufi orders like Suhrawardīs and Naqsbandīs.[19] The *ʿulamā* argued that by implying that there is a possibility of union between the Creator and creation, the Chishtīs committed heresy against the fundamental teachings of Islam. Aquil highlighted this tussle between the Sufi masters and the rulers and *ʿulamā* with the occasional mention of the tussle between various rival Sufi orders.

In the first chapter of *Lovers of God*, Aquil portrays the work of two simultaneous forces (i.e., the Sultanate army and the Sufis and their disciples) which were working independently for their gain in early medieval India, which in turn helped the cause of Islam. The sultan was trying to expand the frontiers of the nascent Islamic state as much as possible, while the Sufis were engaged in establishing their roots in the masses. The initial problem the sultans faced was what kind of state would be the new sultanate. Would it be a purely Islamic state following the *sharīʿah* law or a state which follows secular law (*żawābiṭ-i mulkī*)? After

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[17] John A. Subhan, *Suifism: Its Saints and Shrines*, rev. ed. (Lucknow: Lucknow Publishing House, 1960), 230-33.

[18] Ernst and Lawrence, *Sufi Martyrs of Love*, 108.

[19] Aquil, *Lovers of God*, 26.

much consideration, the sultans preferred the latter system.[20] The two rival Sufi orders (i.e., the Chishtīs and the Suhrawardīs) were at that time contesting for their spiritual dominion.

Even with the spectacular success of the Islamic state in the political sphere of India, an old question was what should be done with the large Hindu population of the sultanate. Many *'ulamā'* including Baranī were in favour of mass conversion or execution. The sultans were confused between the notion of treating them as *kāfir*s or treating them as *ahl al-kitāb* in exchange for *jizyah*.[21] *Jizyah* was not a humiliating tax as some modern scholars believe. Rather, it was a blessing for non-Muslims who were able to free themselves from their military obligations towards the state by paying *jizyah.* This facility was not accorded to Muslims.[22] Sufi masters, especially those of the Chishtī order, were against both of these notions. Their *malfūẓāt* and *tadhkirah*s indicate that they were against the use of the sword for the spread of Islam. Aquil notes how Amīr Khusrau rejoiced in 'Alā' al-Dīn Khaljī's executions of non-Muslims.[23] However, he did not mention the dilemma of Khusrau when he observed the horror of war in Khaljī's Deccan campaign.[24]

Some Notions of Chishtī Sufis

The main controversies regarding the Sufi masters were due to some unorthodox religious practices endorsed by them. Ernst and Lawrence discuss various religious practices endorsed by the Chishtī saints. *Dhikr* (remembrance) continues to be the central part of the Sufi practice. The main notion of *dhikr* is based on the testimony (*shahādah*) that there is no god but Allah. The Sufi saints from generation to generation continued to add their formulations of a combination of divine names and passed them to their disciples, which made the *dhikr* of one order distinctive from another. The differences between Niẓāmī Chishtīs' and Ṣābirī Chishtīs' *dhikr* can be mentioned in this context.[25] The most important Chishtī works on *dhikr* were penned by Shāh Kalīm Allāh Jahānābādī and his disciple Niẓām al-Dīn Aurangābādī in the eighteenth century. In his *Niẓām*

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[20] Ibid., 42.

[21] Ibid., 61.

[22] Ibid., 159.

[23] Ibid., 57.

[24] Amīr Khusrau, *Khazā'inul Futūh (Treasures of Victory)*, trans. Muḥammad Habīb (Madras: D. B. Taraporwala, 1931), 152; Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, *On History and Historians of Medieval India* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1983), 10.

[25] Ernst and Lawrence, *Sufi Martyrs of Love*, 28.

al-Qulūb (Order of the Hearts), Aurangābādī gave detailed instructions regarding how to properly perform *dhikr*. However, he advised his readers to find first a guide rather than individually performing *dhikr* with the help of his work. Like Muḥammad Ghauth of the Shaṭṭārī order, Aurangābādī also tried to link Hindu yogic tradition with *dhikr* in his work.[26] Ernst and Lawrence note that the Chishtīs' *dhikr* is different from the *dhikr* of Naqsbandīs in the sense that the latter use only Arabic while performing *dhikr*.[27]

Chishtī literature indicates that the *samā'* was an important part of Chishtī religious practices. Its importance can be measured by the fact that Quṭb al-Dīn Bakhtiyār Kākī, on his deathbed, asked a *qawwāl* to recite some couplets and died listening to them. Although the second chapter of *Lovers of God* mostly discusses various aspects of *samā'*, Aquil explains some basic concepts about the Sufi philosophy of *waḥdat al-wujūd* and Advaita Hinduism.[28] The author tried to trace the views of early Sufis like Rābi'ah al-Baṣriyyah, Bāyzīd Busṭāmī and others to the three dimensions of Islam: *islām* (submission) described by the jurists; *īmān* (faith) explained by the theologians; and *iḥsān* (to do beautiful things) practised by the Sufis.[29] Aquil constructed a general idea of Sufism and *samā'*. The concept of *samā'* on a theocratical level is related to a much bigger paradox than the mundane world. This paradox is concerned with the relationship between the "Divine Beloved, who is the supreme creator, and human lover, who is but a humble creature." This notion was elaborated by Sufi theorists in two contrasting ways, i.e., *waḥdat al-wujūd* (the unity of being) and *waḥdat al-shuhūd* (the unity of witness).[30] The debate over the legality of these contrasting notions was continued by the *'ulamā'* and Sufis alike from the earliest time of Sufism.[31]

Two important Indian works on *samā'* were penned by Chishtī saints: *Uṣūl al-Samā'* by Fakhr al-Dīn Zarrādī and *Risālah-i Samā'* by Ḥamīd al-Dīn Nāgaurī. Zarrādī concerned himself with describing the proper methods of practising *Samā'* while Nāgaurī's work described the benefits of *samā'* in the process of attaining union with God. Not only *'ulamā'* but also many Sufi saints did not favour the practice of *samā'*. Hujwīrī noted that *samā'* could do more harm than good to a novice Sufi. Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā'

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[26] Ibid., 32.

[27] Ibid., 33.

[28] Aquil, *Lovers of God*, 65-66.

[29] Ibid., 64.

[30] Ernst and Lawrence, *Sufi Martyrs of Love*, 34.

[31] Ibid.

also urged his followers to take utmost caution while listening and taking part in *samā'*.[32] Zarrādī also echoed Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā's viewpoint on *samā'*.[33]

In their studies, Annemarie Schimmel and Simon Digby hold that a Sufi master must have the ability to perform miracles.[34] Ernst and Lawrence tried to understand Chishtī saints' *karāmāt* (saintly miracles) and their attitude towards the performers of *karāmāt*. Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā''s *karāmāt* were never discussed in *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād*. *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād* mostly narrates Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā''s accounts regarding the *karāmāt* performed by his master Farīd al-Dīn Ganj-i Shakar and other saints of the past. However, Amīr Khurd's *Siyar al-Awliyā'* does mention Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā''s *karāmāt*. However, *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād* and *Siyar al-Awliyā'* show that Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā' held that the performance of *karāmāt* creates hindrance in one's spiritual progress, but, on the other hand, he extolled the importance of *karāmāt* and considered *karāmāt* important for spiritual attainment of a mystic.[35] Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā' stresses that nobody should have doubts about the prophetic miracles (*mu'jizāt)*. He advised his disciples to "believe firmly and do not try to investigate. One should have faith in matters of religion; one should not persist in exploring or scrutinizing them."[36] Although he considered the importance of *karāmāt*, he vehemently criticized the saints who used their supernatural powers for public display.[37]

Aquil saw *karāmāt* of Sufi saints as a way to establish their authority and influence and also compel non-Muslims to convert to Islam. He highlights how Sufi saints performed *karāmāt* to counter the oppressive behaviour of sultans and the ruling class. According to him, "the source of this conflict lay in the *wilayat* of the shaikh, which encroached for all practical purposes, the territorial authority of the ruler."[38] The conflicts between Sufi saints and the rulers can relate to the remarks of Richard Eaton, according to whom, there were two options available to Sufis and

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[32] Aquil, *Lovers of God*, 71.

[33] Ibid., 72.

[34] Annemarie Schimmel, "Sufi Biographies," paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Society for the Study of Religion, Cincinnati, Ohio, April 27, 1975; Simon Digby, "Abd al-Quddus Gangohi (A.D. 1456-1537): The Personality and Attitudes of a Medieval Indian Sufi," in *Medieval India - A Miscellany*, ed. K. A. Nizami (Aligarh: Centre of Advanced Study, Department of History, Aligarh Muslim University, 1975), 3:17-18.

[35] Amīr Ḥasan Sijzī, ed., *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād* (Lucknow: Newal Kishore, 1884), 117.

[36] Ernst and Lawrence, *Sufi Martyrs of Love*, 75.

[37] Sijzī, *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād*.

[38] Aquil, *Lovers of God*, 87.

the rulers regarding their relationship with each other: either cooperate or defy each other.[39] The Chishtī saints followed both approaches alternatively whenever it suited them. Aquil noted that the Chishtī saints considered their authority superior to the rulers and thus refused to accept grants from the sultans and attend their courts, which would have lowered their spiritual authority. Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā' even advised his followers not to mingle with the ruling class.[40] The sultans, for their part, tried to win this battle by brute force.[41] However, Sufi saints were not always on the wrong side of the rulers. More than often they came to the aid of the sultans, and with their *karāmāt* saved the day.[42]

Ernst and Lawrence also highlighted some of the conflicts and the cooperation of Chishtī saints with the rulers. They gave a detailed account of the cordial relationship between Nūr Quṭb-i 'Ālam, one of the disciples of Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā' and the ruler of Bengal. Ernst and Lawrence also noted that the Chishtī saints' spiritual authority was superior to the rulers, as their spiritual authority overshadowed the rulers because they were not only religious and political but also cultural.[43] One may conclude that the Chishtī saints' relationship with rulers should not be seen in a binary mood, as to whether they took part in politics or not. They were involved in politics when it suited them and refrained from taking part in politics when it did not.[44]

Conversion and the Chishtī Saints

The Chishtī pantheistic concept of *waḥdat al-wujūd* brought them closer to the Indic thought, which most other Sufi orders like Suhrawardīs and Naqshbandīs failed to achieve.[45] Chishtī saints were very enthusiastic

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[39] Richard Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier: 1204-1760* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 94.

[40] Sijzī, *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād*, 119.

[41] Aquil, *Lovers of God*, 91-92.

[42] Ibid., 94-97.

[43] Ernst and Lawrence, *Sufi Martyrs of Love*, 96-97.

[44] Muzaffar Alam, "Assimilation from a Distance: Confrontation and Sufi Accommodation in Awadh Society," in *Tradition, Dissent and Ideology: Essays in Honour of Romila Thapar*, ed. R. Champakalakshmi and S. Gopal (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986), 164-191; Simon Digby, "The Sufi Shaykh as a Source of Authority in Medieval India," *Purushartha* 9 (1986): 55-77; Richard Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur, 1300-1700: Social Roles of Sufis in Medieval India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978); Ishtiyaq Ahmad Zilli, "Early Chishtis and the State," in *Sufi Cults and the Evolution of Medieval Indian Culture*, ed. Anup Taneja (Delhi: Indian Council of Historical Research, 2003), 54-108.

[45] M. Mujeeb, *Indian Muslims* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1967), 297-98; Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, *Muslim Revivalist Movements in Northern India in the Sixteenth and*

about the formal conversion. Ernst and Lawrence only discussed the issue of conversion in the chapters concerning colonial and modern Chishtīs, where they noted that colonial and modern Chishtī saints tried to enlarge their followers and cope with various challenges. Aquil, however, addressed the issue of conversion in a better way. He showed that from the very beginning Chishtī saints sought to convert people to Islam. He noted that whenever a Sufi saint arrived in a new Indian land, his authority was always immediately challenged by the incumbent priests of that place and in this situation, the Sufi would only be able to establish his authority by performing saintly miracles.[46] However, modern scholars often dubbed these saintly miracles described in Sufi literature as "fabricated" and thus categorized this literature into authentic and fabricated. Aquil is critical of this categorization. He noted that the "classification of the texts as 'authentic' and 'spurious' is superficial as both are suffused with the amusing tales of miracles which may indeed sound irrational to the 'modern' mind."[47] Aquil classified the Sufi saints' tactics of converting the masses to Islam into three categories: Individual conversion, group conversion, and forced conversion. The author also gave some interesting details regarding the conversion of non-Muslims to Islam from the accounts of Sufi literature.[48]

Khānqāhs, *Jamā'at Khānahs*, and *Dargāhs* of Chishtī Saints

The Chishtīs established themselves in the Indian subcontinent as early as the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate. They organized their Sufi order in a hierarchy of institutions. The spiritual geography of the subcontinent was dotted with large *khānqāh*s (Sufi lodges), smaller *jamā'at khānah*s (hospices with dormitories for disciples), and crowded *dargāh*s (shrines) of the Sufi saints. These institutions played an important role in spreading Islamic as well as the Chishtī ideals.[49] From these institutions, the living Sufi masters guided their followers and after their death, their shrines (*dargāh*s) became places of pilgrimage for their followers. Chishtī sources provide detailed accounts of how people often visited Sufi masters, seeking their blessings, amulets, and cure for their pains. Thus, these institutions became the hotbed of cultural integration for people from

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Seventeenth Centuries (Agra: Agra University and Balakrishna Book Company, 1965), 54-56.

[46] Aquil, *Lovers of God*, 110.

[47] Ibid., 115.

[48] Ibid., 117-30.

[49] Ibid., 54.

different religions, casts, and creeds. However, some visitors created problems for the Sufi masters. Aquil shows how Qalandars visiting the *jamā'at khānah*s of Chishtī saints like Farīd al-Dīn Ganj-i Shakar, Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā', and Chirāgh-i Dihlī did or planned to harm the Sufi masters.[50] These *jamā'at khānah*s also became the common ground for demonstrating the Sufi master's spiritual superiority. Aquil explains how the Yogis and Brahmins would arrive in the *jamā'at khāna*s of the Sufis and challenge them to show their *karāmāt*, and after witnessing their power, they would often convert to Islam and became disciples of the Sufi masters.[51]

Conclusion

Aquil highlights some controversial issues regarding the politics and Sufism of medieval India that were previously ignored by historians. However, his book is not without shortcomings. While describing the relationship between Sufis and medieval states, he mostly confines himself to highlighting the incidents that occurred between Sufi saints of the Chishtī order and sultans of various dynasties of the Delhi Sultanate. Even, among the Chishtī saints, the author mostly focuses on various incidents from the life of Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā', ignoring the lives of other Chishtī saints. Moreover, he did not elaborate on the relationship between the Suhrawardī saints and the Delhi Sultanate. However, he provided some accounts of Qalandars, who operated between the religious boundaries of Islam and Hinduism. The author also ignored the Mughal state's relationship with the Chishtī and Naqshbandī Sufi orders. It seems as if the whole book—except the last chapter—was themed around one Chishtī saint Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā'. Another shortcoming relates to the thematic order of the book's chapters. Since the book is a compilation of the articles the author wrote over decades, it lacks thematic coherence and readers often notice the repetition of accounts from previous chapters. The readers also wonder how the last chapter is related to the rest of the book. It also seems very far off from the original theme of the book, i.e., Sufism and the politics of medieval India. In his part, however, Aquil did try to connect these loosely related chapters with a well-crafted prologue and epilogue.

Ernst and Lawrence did not confine themselves to the religious and political history of the Sultanate era. Rather their work offers a glimpse into the entire history of the Chishtī Sufi order of the Indian subcontinent. It sheds light on various mystic practices endorsed by the Chishtī saints

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[50] Ibid., 106.

[51] Ibid., 111.

and their origin and legality in Islamic jurisprudence. Apart from these points, what makes Ernst and Lawrence's work unique is their research and their interest in the opinions of modern Chishtī masters, who with modern innovations continued the Chishtī Sufi tradition and spread it beyond South Asia. For instance, modern Chishtī Sufis like Syed Muhammad Zauqi Shah, Wahid Bakhsh Sial Rabbani, and Inayat Khan continued the Chishtī Sufi tradition and moulded it in such a way to reach the younger generation. However, this strategy has its limits and sometimes it became opposite to the very ideals of the Chishtī order, which advocated the language of love and peace. Zauqi Shah's involvement in the politics of British India gave his teachings an anti-Hindu and anti-Semitic look. Modern Christī Sufis' attachment to the *dargāh*s of famous Chishtī saints and the rise of the *khādim* system in the management of the *dargāh*s and their subsequent quarrelling over the financial resources of the *dargāh*s had little to do with the ideals of early Chishtī masters, i.e., giving away all the wealth received in a donation to the service of the poor.

One may conclude that the work of Ernst and Lawrence and that of Aquil make a significant contribution to the studies on the Chishtī Sufi order. Together with many *malfūẓāt, maktūbāt,* hagiographies, treaties, books, articles, brief essays, and collective volumes dedicated to the study of the Chishtī Sufi order in the past few decades, the books under review demonstrate how more detailed studies of primary sources can broaden our horizon of knowledge on the Chishtī Sufi order. The history of the Chishtī Sufi order is not just focused on the biographies and verbal discourses of famous Chishtī saints but it also provides a sociocultural environment in which the saints carried their work. The books under review help the readers to understand the ideals, concepts, and core practices of the Chishtī order as well as the prevailing socioeconomic and politico-cultural circumstances in which it thrived.

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