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Assertions of Authority: A Study of the Discursive Statements of Two Sultans of Delhi

SUNIL KUMAR

Introduction

In 695/1296 'Alā' al-Dīn Khalajī seized the throne of Delhi and ruled until 715/1316. About ten years earlier, around 685/1286, a young mystic, the Sufi Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā' (d. 725/1325) established his hospice at Ghiyaspur, near Delhi. By the turn of the century, both individuals had consolidated their power and influence over significant portions of the residents of Delhi and beyond. Both held 'court' daily: subjects, disciples and laity congregated for their benediction, favours and sermons. If we follow the literature contemporaneous with the lives of the two protagonists, specifically the writings of Amīr Khusrāu and Amīr Hasan Sijzī, it seems as if Delhi had two Sultans ruling simultaneously.

Occasionally the literature from the medieval period clarifies that the two governed separate realms: 'Alā' al-Dīn over the temporal Sultanate and Nizām al-Dīn over the mystical, spiritual domain. The clarifications notwithstanding, there was earnest debate about the boundaries of their realms, and perhaps even more so, the relative moral superiority of one over the other. Each in his way suggested that he was responsible for maintaining moral order in the world; a disagreement over the understanding of moral conduct, to emphasize not companionable neighbourliness, but encompassment by one of the other.

The nature of the competitive relationship between some Sufis and the Delhi Sultans in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries has attracted the attention of a host of modern scholars. Their conclusions, however, are

perhaps as wide apart as their assumptions about the great divide separating the spiritual from the material world. On the one hand, Mohammad Habib and Khaliq Ahmad Nizami have argued that Sufis who belonged to the Chishtī order were uniformly other-worldly, with no inclination to associate, in any form, with the state.¹ On the other hand Simon Digby argues for the extreme competitiveness present between different Sufi groups and amongst the Chishtīs, their intermittent intervention in the politics of the Sultanate and their worldly wisdom in running the affairs of their hospices and respective fortunes.²

On a subject concerning contesting claims to authority, it is notable that all scholars, even from opposing view points, limit their study to the moral reservations of the Sufis concerning temporal government. It was presumed that the Delhi Sultans, involved with administration and resource management, invested little serious effort in seeking a moral validity for their regimes. An alternative explanation suggested that Sultans were sometimes puppets, at other times allies, of the conservative and reactionary 'Ulamā', and under their influence harassed the more ascetic, liberally inclined mystics.³ Both assumptions were close to the discourse of the Sufi texts and helped consolidate the image of the coercive, arbitrary nature of Sultanate government, divorced from and unimpressed by public opinion. In a sense, therefore, scholars privileged one perspective in their

¹ See M. Habib, 'Chishtī Mystics Records of the Sultanate Period', *Medieval India Quarterly*, vol. 1, 1940, pp. 1-42; idem, 'Shaikh Nāṣiruddīn Mahmūd Chirāgh-i Dehlī as a Great Historical Personality', *Islamic Culture*, vol. 20, 1946, pp. 129-53; idem, *Ḥazrat Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā: Ḥayāt aur Ta'limāt*, Delhi, 1972; K. A. Nizami, 'Early Indo-Muslim Mystics and their Attitude towards the State', *Islamic Culture*, vol. 22, 1948, pp. 387-98; vol. 23, 1949, pp. 13-21, 162-70, 312-21; vol. 24, 1950, pp. 60-71; idem, *Some Aspects of Religion and Politics in India during the Thirteenth Century*, Delhi, rpt., 1974; idem, *The Life and Times of Shaikh Farīd-ud-dīn Ganj-i Shakar*, Delhi, rpt., 1987; idem, *The Life and Times of Shaikh Nizām-ud-dīn Auliya*, Delhi, 1991.

² S. Digby, 'The Sufi Shaikh as a Source of Authority in Medieval India', *Puruṣārtha, Islam and Society in South Asia*, vol. 9, 1986, pp. 57-77; idem, *Tabarrukāt and Succession among the Great Chishtī Shaykhs of the Delhi Sultanate*, in R. E. Frykenberg, ed., *Delhi through the Ages*, Delhi, 1986, pp. 63-103; idem, 'The Sufi Shaykh and the Sultan: A Conflict of Claims to Authority in Medieval India', *Iran*, vol. 28, 1990, pp. 71-81; idem, 'Qalandars and Related Groups: Elements of Social Deviance in the Religious Life of the Delhi [sic] Sultanate of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries', in Y. Friedmann, ed., *Islam in Asia, vol. 1, South Asia*, Jerusalem and Boulder, Colorado, 1984, pp. 60-108; idem, 'Anecdotes of a Provincial Sufi of the Delhi Sultanate, Khwaja Gurg of Kara', *Iran*, vol. 32, 1994, pp. 99-109; idem, 'To Ride a Tiger or a Wall? Strategies of Prestige in Indian Sufi Legend', forthcoming.

³ See the writings of K. A. Nizami above, and A. M. Husain, *Tughluq Dynasty*, Delhi, rpt., 1976, pp. 358-82.

understanding of the relationship between Sultans and Sufis, a partial reading which ignored the manner in which competing discourses may have addressed each other.

In an effort to re-evaluate some of these questions, this paper studies the discursive statements of 'Alā' al-Dīn Khalajī and Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā' concerning the moral right to authority. These two individuals were selected because they were contemporaries, and because of the unique availability of 'sources' which makes it possible to study and juxtapose their self-reflective claims to authority. Hitherto most scholars have sought to understand the nature of the relationship between the Sufis and the Sultans through the chronicles of the Delhi court or the biographical encyclopaedias, *taẓkirats*, of the Sufis. They have frequently assumed that these reports described the 'actual' nature of the relationship between the two groups, ignoring the discursive, rhetorical content of the narratives.⁴ In describing the relationship between the Sultans and the Sufis, the authors of the chronicles and *taẓkirats* provided ideological statements to support the claims to predominance of their respective protagonists. Significantly, these were not the discursive constructions of the participants themselves, but accounts of observers and latter-day reporters. Although a study of this literature is important in itself, it is peripheral to the main thrust of my paper. To my mind, the case of 'Alā' al-Dīn Khalajī and Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā' provides us with a unique opportunity to study the rhetorical claims of the two contestants themselves, an opportunity to note the construction of contending sets of discursive statements which were to eventually develop a long and embellished history.

I reverse here the order in which Sufi-Sultan relations have been usually studied, and start by first evaluating 'Alā' al-Dīn's ideological statements.

⁴ This would be true for the writings of Habib, Nizami (cited above), S. A. Rizvi, *A History of Sufism*, Delhi, 1978, and A. Ahmad, 'The Sufi and the Sultan in Pre-Mughal Muslim India', *Der Islam*, 1963, pp. 142-53. The research of Digby (mentioned earlier) has drawn our attention to the rhetorical element present in *taẓkirat* literature. Over the years Bruce Lawrence has also started paying greater attention to the didactic element in Sufi texts. Compare his *Notes from a Distant Flute: The Extant Literature of Pre-Mughal Indian Sufism*, Tehran, 1978, with his later writings: idem, 'The Earliest Chishtiya and Shaikh Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā', in Frykenberg, ed., *Delhi*... pp. 104-28; idem, 'Biography and the 17th Century Qadiriyya of North India', paper presented in the Conference on Regional Varieties of Islam in Pre-Modern India, Heidelberg, 1989, forthcoming. A concern for the discursive stance present in the *mafiẓāt* and *taẓkirat* literature also informs the monographs of Richard Eaton. See in particular his *Sufis of Bijapur: Social Roles of Sufis in Medieval India*, Princeton, 1978. C. W. Ernst, *Eternal Garden: Mysticism, History, and Politics at a South Asian Sufi Center*, Albany, 1992, carries the most extensive comment on the historiographic problems in using 'sources' of this genre.

In my argument, the Delhi Sultan's dramatic public claims to the right to lead and command his subjects were most clearly articulated in his monumental architecture and inscriptions. The most coherent and focused presentation of these statements are located in 'Alā' al-Dīn's contributions to Delhi's first congregational mosque, *masjid-i jāmi'*, also known today as the Qutb mosque. I have analysed the architectural form of this monument and its inscriptions as a discursive text which expresses the structures of belief and conduct supporting the Sultan's claims to authority. This also provides the context for my study of the conversations of the Sufi *pir*, Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā, transcribed by his disciple Amīr Ḥasan Sijzī in *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād*, or 'Morals for the Heart' (completed 722/1322).⁵ As I have argued, the saint's conversations did not merely 'guide' his disciples along the path (*tarīqa*) of the saint, they also contradicted the structures of thought and belief which empowered 'Alā' al-Dīn's claims to authority.

A study of the textual strategies of the two protagonists, however, does not merely elaborate their rival 'claims', it also enlarges on the manner in which their ideological formulations engaged with and sought to shape resident meanings of belief and morality. This was possible in a context where Islamic doctrinal strictures and orthopraxis were fluid enough to allow for a number of competing normative systems each claiming to represent hallowed 'orthodoxies'. The discursive ability of one point of view to impress a large audience of the merits of its beliefs was therefore of the greatest importance, and this was precisely the agenda of 'Alā' al-Dīn Khalajī and Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā. Much of the literature which subsequently reported upon the history of these two individuals reacted in different ways to their individual claims to authority. In this paper I have studied Amīr Khusrāu's *Khazā'in al-Futūḥ* (compiled 711/1311-12), the 'Treasures of Victory', and Ziyā' al-Dīn Baranī's *Tārīkh-i Firūz Shāhī* (final compilation, late 750s/1350s), not so much to discover who eventually 'triumphed' in this 'conflict'—and the competition any way only had temporary resolutions—but to examine the manner in which two very partisan authors responded to the discursive statements of their patrons.⁶

⁵ Amīr Ḥasan Sijzī, *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād*, ed. K.H.S. Nizāmī, Delhi, 1990. The Persian text in this edition is an exact duplicate of M.L. Malik's (including pagination and critical commentary) published in Lahore, 1966.

⁶ Amīr Khusrāu, *Khazā'in al-Futūḥ*, ed. W. Mirzā, Calcutta, 1953; Ziyā' al-Dīn Baranī, *Tārīkh-i Firūz Shāhī*, ed. S.A. Khān, Calcutta, 1860-2.

'Alā' al-Dīn and the Delhi Congregational Mosque

'Alā' al-Dīn is not remembered by historians for his ideological utterances. It is his military campaigns into south India, the ruthless extermination of his political competitors, and his coercive administrative measures concerning revenue extraction and price regulations that have attracted the attention of scholars.⁷ What is often relegated to an appendix, if at all remembered, is the fact that the most ambitious [re-]construction activity within the Delhi congregational mosque, the *masjid-i jāmi'*, occurred during this Sultan's reign.⁸ It was not the whimsical, capricious fancies of a despot that motivated 'Alā' al-Dīn Khalajī to invest huge sums of money in the construction and extension of the old congregational mosque in Delhi. As the *masjid-i jāmi'* of the town, the congregational mosque was the focal point in the social life of the city's Muslim inhabitants. Aside from its importance as a place of Friday prayer, it was also the place where protests were voiced, teaching and adjudication heard and festivals celebrated. The main commercial areas of the city were in its vicinity,⁹ and in one way or other a large number of Delhi residents interacted with the mosque in the daily course of their lives. It was, therefore, at an extremely judicious choice of site that 'Alā' al-Dīn chose to leave his mark.

At the time of his accession, the Delhi *masjid-i jāmi'* carried the impress of Sultan Shams al-Dīn Iltutmish's (607-33/1210-36) architectural contributions.¹⁰ It was already a huge and magnificent mosque, to which the Khalajī ruler added two courtyards together with colonnaded bays on the north and east, enlarging the structure until it was twice the size of the original. His screens on the west wall are no longer extant, but excavations

⁷ A basic bibliography on 'Alā' al-Dīn would include I. Habib, 'Baranī's Theory of the Delhi Sultanate', *Indian Historical Review*, vol. 7, 1980-1, pp. 99-115; idem, 'The Price Regulations of 'Alā' uddīn Khalajī—A Defence of Zia' Baranī', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. 21, 1984, pp. 393-414; I. Habib and T. Raychaudhuri, eds., *The Cambridge Economic History*, Cambridge, 1982, vol. 1; and K.S. Lal, *History of the Khalajis*, Delhi, rpt., 1980.

⁸ See, most recently, A. Welch, 'Architectural Patronage and the Past: The Tughluq Sultans of India', *Muqarnas*, vol. 10, 1993, p. 314, who records 'Alā' al-Dīn's contribution to the mosque only in the context of the evolution of the arch. Note also Lal, *History of the Khalajis*, where the last chapter has a section on 'Architecture' and a description of the Delhi congregational mosque.

⁹ Around 633/1236, according to Minhāj-i Sirāj Juzjānī, *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāsiri*, ed. 'A.H. Ḥabībī, Kabul, 1963-4, vol. 1, p. 461, the *bāzār-i bazzāzān*, the market of the cloth-merchants was located to the south of the *masjid-i jāmi'*, adjacent to the Mu'izzī *madrasa*.

¹⁰ See my forthcoming 'Defining and Contesting Territory: the Delhi *Masjid-i Jāmi'* in the Thirteenth Century' for details.

in the 1920s determined that the foundations of the load bearing pillars of the screen were thicker and interspersed at greater distances than the ones constructed by Iltutmish. The size of the arches and the mass of the construction of the screen in 'Alā' al-Dīn's additional courtyards must have therefore been both bigger and heavier than in the earlier mosque.¹¹ The increase in the size of the screen harmonized with the dimensions of the additional courtyards in the reconstructed mosque.

Since the intention was quite obviously to detract, diminish, and effectively hegemonize Iltutmish's architectural contributions to the Delhi *masjid-i jāmi'*, the old minaret had to be dwarfed. Towards this end, 'Alā' al-Dīn ordered the construction of a new *minār* in the northern courtyard of the mosque. Amūr Khusrāu noted that the height of the new *minār* would be twice that of the old, which in its own time had been unique in the world: *yagāna 'i dūniyāst diğāna gardānad*. And again, since increased height implied a heavier girth and mass, the circumference of the new minaret was doubled.¹² Although 'Alā' al-Dīn's death left the *minār* incomplete, the dated inscriptions on the southern gate of the mosque, and Amūr Khusrāu's independent corroboration, suggest that the rest of the construction was probably finished by 15 Shawwal 710/7 March 1311.¹³

Apparently the Sultan also repaired the final storey of the old *minār*. Taken together with his additions in the mosque precincts, the renovated minaret may well have seemed like a new construction. At least one anonymous visitor to the city believed this to be the case. His inscription, scrawled in the nature of a graffiti, assumed that 'Alā' al-Dīn had built the [old] *minār*.¹⁴ Yet, it is doubtful if 'Alā' al-Dīn purposefully sought to

¹¹ J. A. Page, *An Historical Memoir on the Qutb*, Calcutta, 1926, pp. 16-17.

¹² Khusrāu, *Khazā' in al-Futūḥ*, pp. 24-5.

¹³ Khusrāu, *ibid.*, mentions 711/1311 as the year by which the gates and the walls of the mosque were completed. He also specifies (pp. 35-6) that the more ambitious *minār* was at that time still incomplete. See G. Yazdani, 'Inscriptions of the Khalij Sultans of Delhi and their Contemporaries in Bengal', *Epigraphia Indo-Moslemica*, 1917-18, pp. 25-6, 27-8, and Page, *An Historical Memoir on the Qutb*, pp. 34-5, 37. The reader should beware of misprints in the conversion of the Hijri dates into the Christian era in Yazdani, p. 26, and in the English transcription of the Hijri date in Page, p. 35. Rather than Page, I have followed Yazdani's Persian transcription of the inscriptions on the 'Alā' al-Dīn Darwāza. In many instances Yazdani's transcriptions are more complete and careful (for an exception, however, see later).

¹⁴ The Devnāgarī inscription described the *minār* as *Shrī Sultān Alāwādī Vijayashambhū*, 'Alā' al-Dīn's pillar of victory'. Page, *An Historical Memoir on the Qutb*, p. 41, and M. C. Joshi, 'Some Nagari Inscriptions on the Qutb Minar, Medieval India—A Miscellany', vol. 2, 1972, pp. 3-4.

obscure the evidence of old construction.¹⁵ As we will see later, it was important for him to appear as the 'restorer', the 'reviver' of the Muslim community. In that sense, rehabilitating the congregational mosque, extending and improving its environs, were the accomplishments of a ruler terminating and reversing the years of ill fortune suffered by the Muslim community under less capable Sultans. Seeking public acclaim for his actions, the Sultan was precise about narrating his motivations in (re-) building the *masjid-i jāmi'* and the reasons why people should recognize the mosque as a sacred precinct. His statements were inscribed as epigraphs which framed the doorways of the newly constructed entrance hall to the mosque, eponymously named today as the 'Alā' al-Dīn Darwāza.

The Congregational Mosque and 'Alā' al-Dīn's Claims to Authority

'Alā' al-Dīn Khilajī's inscriptions on the 'Alā' al-Dīn Darwāza consisted of an even mixture of Qur'ānic verses, traditions of the Prophet and commemorative statements praising the actions of the Sultan. They were inscribed in ornamental *nashk* over the arches and pillars of the gates and windows in the entrance hall. Even a visitor such as Saiyid Ahmad Khan, initiated in the reading of epigraphs in a variety of different scripts, found it difficult to follow the inscriptions in the far reaches of the structure. In the thirteenth century few Muslims could have been literate in Arabic or Persian, far be it in *nashk*. At the time of their emplacement, we need to remember, therefore, that the inscriptions were largely unread.

Even so, the inscriptions and their 'monumental' context could hardly have been ignored, and within the mosque, where visitors acknowledged their submission to their Maker, 'the Word', transcribed in visually attractive forms, was manifest all around. As much as the threat of a frowning icon, or the sense of bliss imparted by a benedictory idol, the inscriptions awed visitors, and served to convey the gravity of the Word of God in their daily lives. Moreover, at least a gist of the message of the inscriptions and their significance was conveyed to the congregation in the sermons of the *imām*, the *khātib* and the *mutaẓakkir* who preached, harangued and exhorted Muslims to follow the righteous path and 'obey the orders of their commanders' (*baimtiṣāl awāmīr ulū' al-amr*).¹⁶ The

¹⁵ Here he was quite different from Iltutmish (607-33/1210-36): see Kumar, 'Defining and Contesting Territory ...'.

¹⁶ Concerning the *taẓkīr*, exhortation given by the *mutaẓakkir*, see Jūzjānī, *Tabaqāt* ..., vol. 2, p. 76.

sense, if not the text of the epigraphs, was thereby brought home to those present in the most direct way possible, and there was no gainsaying the fact that the Delhi *masjid-i-jāmi'* allowed for a very focused representation of Islam. The mosque was a site of community socialization, a place where Muslims were educated in ritual, conduct, values and interpersonal relationships, all authenticated by the formal curriculum of texts, Prophetic traditions, and history.

'Alā' al-Dīn Khalajī was not, however, the first Sultan who sought to impress congregations with inscriptions. He had been preceded in this by Qutb al-Dīn Aī-Beg (602-7/1206-10) and more immediately by Ilutmish. Yet 'Alā' al-Dīn's inscriptions differed dramatically from those of his predecessors. Whereas Ilutmish's epigraphs had emphasized the need for Muslims to follow the *Sharī'a*, and for disciplining popular social practices, the actual implementation of this orthopraxis had been left to the initiative of the 'Ulamā'. The Sultan did not claim powers of actually implementing the *Sharī'a* within his domain.¹⁷

By contrast, 'Alā' al-Dīn's inscription on the right pier of the southern arch of his gate presents the Delhi Sultan as the 'strengthened' (*muwakkid*) of the pulpits of religious instruction and mosques, the confirmer (*muwattid*) of the rules of the schools and places of worship, the fortifier (*mu'mahhid*) of the foundations of Muslim laws.¹⁸ In other words, it was through the personal intervention of the king that the Muslim community had the opportunity to learn, and be guided by, the social and religious precepts of the *Sharī'a*. The construction of the *masjid-i-jāmi'* was the means whereby civilization, a society cognisant with the dictates of the Holy Law, was rendered possible by the Sultan, and it was for this reason that another inscription implored, 'may God perpetuate his kingdom (so that he may continue) to build mosques, and preserve till eternity his sovereignty (so as to protect) the lustre of the places of worship'.¹⁹

'Alā' al-Dīn argued that he had the prerogative to intervene in the affairs of the Holy Law, because he belonged to a hallowed lineage favoured by God. This lineage, however, excluded the earlier Delhi Sultans. According to 'Alā' al-Dīn, his innate pueristic virtues had attracted God's favour. Three separate inscriptions on the Darwāza informed visitors that God had chosen 'Alā' al-Dīn as Sultan because he possessed the attributes of Moses

¹⁷ For a more detailed discussion of this point see my forthcoming 'Defining and Contesting Territory ...'

¹⁸ Inscription on the right pier, south door; Yazdani, 'Inscriptions ...', p. 26.

¹⁹ Inscription on the left pier, east door, *ibid.*, p. 25.

and Solomon, the great keepers of the law in the past.²⁰ In consonance with the traditions of this lineage, God had entrusted him the responsibility of maintaining the commands of the Muslim law, *Sharī'at-i Muḥammadi*, and ensuring that the observances of the Muslim community, *millat-i Ahmadi* were followed. These were grave responsibilities, for the community had fallen into error under less competent shepherds. 'Alā' al-Dīn was, therefore, more than just a 'protector'; he was a 'reviver' (*muhyi*), of the Holy Law who saved Muslims from the errors of sin. The Sultan's inscription puts the case bluntly:

When God Almighty, whose greatness is sublime and whose names are exalted, for the revival of the laws of the [Muslim] community (*ihyā'yi marāsim-i millat*)²¹ and the elevation of the banners of the *Sharī'at*, chose the lord of the Caliphs of the world, (*khudaygān-i Khulafā' i jahānrā*), so that every moment the foundations of the Muslim religion (*asās-i dīn-i Muḥammadi*) and the roots (*binā-yi*), of the Muslim *Sharī'a* are strengthening (*istikhkām mīpazīrad/qawī mīgardad*), and for preserving the state and consolidating the Sultanate (*dawām-i mamlikat wa niẓām-i Saltanat*), [the lord of the Caliphs] built mosques in accordance with the commands of Him beside whom there is no God (Qur'ān, IX: 18). 'But he only shall visit the mosques who believes in God'.²²

Other than acknowledging the divine dispensation, the Khalajī inscriptions linked 'reviving', 'protecting' and 'strengthening' the *Sharī'a* to the construction of mosques. Unlike other rulers who also erected huge edifices, it was not personal vanity that motivated 'Alā' al-Dīn to build Delhi's great *masjid-i jāmi'*. As the Qur'ānic verse IX: 108 cited on the southern door clarified, this was 'a mosque founded on piety'²³ and the remainder of the verse elaborated, 'therein are men who love to purify themselves; and Allah loves those who purify themselves'.²⁴

Even 'Alā' al-Dīn's martial achievements were located within a

²⁰ Inscriptions on the right pier, southern door and the outer arch, eastern door, *ibid.*, pp. 26, 25. For a reference to Darius see inscription on the right pier, eastern door, *ibid.*, p. 24.

²¹ The picture of the Delhi Sultan as the 'reviver of the forgotten commandments, *muhyi-i āsār-i ahkām*', re-occurs on an inscription on the right pier, east door, *ibid.*, p. 24.

²² Inscription on the right pier, west door, *ibid.*, p. 28.

²³ Inscription on the right pier, south door, *ibid.*, p. 26.

²⁴ In contrast to those who built mosques to cause harm, spread disbelief and disunity, Qur'ān, IX: 107. The concluding part of the Qur'ānic verse was not included in the epigraph, but note the inscription on the outer arch, south door where the sentiment, 'This mosque ... was built with a pure motive', was repeated, *ibid.*, p. 27. Note also Khusrāu, *Khazā'in al-Furūq*, p. 23, where the author states that the congregational mosque was commenced 'with a pure motive' (*baniyat-i khālis*).

complicated Islamic folklore where the universal conqueror also possessed the virtues of the learned scholar. His titles, the Alexander of the age, *Sikandar al-ʿahd wa al-zamān*, or the second Alexander, *Sikandar al-ṣānī*, were displayed on the doors of the monument and another inscription clarified that the Sultan was 'the subduer of the infidel of the East and China, the conqueror of sinners (*fujūr*), on the face of the earth'.²⁵ The Qur'ān (XVIII: 82ff.) narrates the story of an ambiguous Zū'l Qarnain, who had protected the civilized world from the inroads of Gog and Magog. This legend was clarified and embellished in the *Sikandar-nāma* cycle of Persian epics where the actions of Zū'l Qarnain were linked with Alexander. In the fourteenth century, the most recent account of Alexander was written in 'Alā' al-Dīn's court by Amīr Khusrāu. Amīr Khusrāu's *ʿĀʾināhā-yi Sikandarī* developed on the twelfth century text of Shaikh Nizāmī Ganjavī which depicted Alexander as a Muslim hero. Although Khusrāu's text departs from Nizāmī's at several points, Alexander's personality as conqueror, builder and teacher remains constant in both versions. Like Nizāmī, Amīr Khusrāu credited Alexander with the conquest of infidel races during his holy wars and with the construction of a wall of copper, iron and sundry other materials to protect Islam from the marauding *yājiūj wa mājiūj*. Both texts establish Alexander's reputation as a teacher who had Aristotle as a companion, but in Khusrāu's version, Sikandar was also a *walī*, a sage and a saint, who discoursed with Greek philosophers like Plato.²⁶

The Khalajī epigraphs on the mosque were sensitive to this legend of Alexander. The inscriptions record 'Alā' al-Dīn's victories over the Chaghtayid Mongols, latter-day descendants of the *yājiūj wa mājiūj*, but they also narrate the Delhi Sultan's virtues as a Muslim hero who resisted wickedness by emulating Alexander's feats of construction.²⁷ Other than

²⁵ Inscription on the left pier of the southern door, *ibid.*, p. 27, and for his titles: inscriptions on the inner arch, eastern door, p. 25, and on the outer arch, west door, p. 29.

²⁶ See W. Mirza, *The Life and Works of Amīr Khusrāu*, Delhi, rpt., 1974, pp. 200-1. On the legend of Alexander in the *Sikandar-nāma* cycle of stories see also J. Renard, *Islam and the Heroic Image: Themes in Literature and the Visual Arts*, Columbia, South Carolina, 1993, pp. 86-92 and A. Abel, 'Iskandar Nāma. (i) Arabic, (ii) Persian', *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Leiden, 1960, new edn, s.v.

²⁷ As a fragmentary inscription found in Bulandshahr confirms, 'Alā' al-Dīn sought to establish a direct parallel with the Alexander of the *Sikandar-nāma* literature. The inscription narrates that 'if Alexander the first constructed one strong wall' (*agar Sikandar-i awwal bakard yek sadāt*) ... then no doubt 'Alā' al-Dīn built others. See W.H. Siddiqi and Z.A. Desai, 'Khalajī and Tughluq Inscriptions from Uttar Pradesh', *Epigraphica Indica, Arabic and Persian Supplement*, 1964, pp. 6-7.

the walls of fortresses, 'Alā' al-Dīn Khalajī, most significantly, built mosques, pulpits and schools. These were constructed to instruct Muslims in the Holy Law, and in another inscription in the *masjid-i jāmi'*, the king explicitly states that he was the 'founder (*mū'asssā*) of the roots of the Hanafī/Nu'mānī school [of law]'.²⁸ 'Alā' al-Dīn's bias towards the Hanafī *maḏhab* gains significance because of his claims to be a jurist, or, in his own words, an 'elucidator of the arguments of [religious] interpretation', *mubārhin-i barāhīn-i ijihād*.²⁹ This statement certainly coincided with Amīr Khusrāu's image of Alexander as the sage, but it also served to obscure the authoritarian intentions of the 'jurist king'. While 'Alā' al-Dīn did indeed 'strengthen' Islam through the construction of mosques and schools, what was left unsaid was that in the institutions he founded Muslims would be socialized into recognizing only one version of the religious doctrine of Islam as legitimate and authoritative. In the absence of coercion the Muslim community would be homogenized into accepting the version of Islam acceptable to the second Alexander. And this moral order, inevitably, had divine sanction.

To Amīr Khusrāu, at least, it was perfectly understandable if ordinary mortals did not fathom 'Alā' al-Dīn's special relationship with God, since 'between him and God there ... [was] a secret understanding' (*miyān-i ū wa khudā'ī rāziy*). This mysterious pact involved the construction of buildings for the pietistic and material welfare of Muslims (*'imārat-i dīn wa dunyā*).³⁰ If Muslims doubted the Sultan's special relationship with God, they did not have to look further than the Delhi *masjid-i jāmi'* for proof. The very iconography of the congregational mosque represented the intimate relationship between the Sultan and his Maker. Amīr Khusrāu's narrative conjured the imagery of a frenetic accumulation of building material for the construction of the pillars of the mosque until

the stones rose from the earth to the moon, and on the face of the stones, Qur'ānic verses were struck (in a manner) impossible to design on wax (*keh bar mūm naqsh na-tawān bast*). [The inscribed pillars] were gradually elevated so that one would think that the Word of God (*kalām Allāh*) was going to heaven and alighting (*firud āwardan*) on the other side in such a way to symbolize the descent of Qur'ān on earth.³¹

Amīr Khusrāu's imagery of Qur'ānic verses traversing the arches of

²⁸ Inscription on the southern door, right pier. Yazdani, 'Inscriptions ...', p. 26.

²⁹ Inscription on the right pier, east door, *ibid.*, p. 24.

³⁰ Khusrāu, *Khaṣṣā' in al-Futūḥ*, p. 23.

³¹ *Ibid.*

the *mihṛāb* wall was wonderful, even if it left the Word of God in the symbolically impossible situation of originating on earth and then attaining paradise before returning. But as we will see later, this may not have been such an anomaly. Meanwhile, the fact that the mosque succeeded in establishing an intimate relationship between God and Sultan, allowed Amīr Khusrāu to argue that 'through the elevation of this inscription (in the mosque) a discourse was born (*nigārī paidā āmad*) between earth and heaven'³² which could never be quenched (*keh hargiz firu na-nishīnad*).³³ This would be the expected relationship between two compatriots sharing a common agenda.

Amīr Khusrāu's semiology also suggested that 'Alā' al-Dīn Khalajī was no passive collaborator in God's great purpose with the world. Yet, by providing the latter an active agency in the making of the Muslim world, Amīr Khusrāu was not arrogating divine powers for him, nor was he suggesting that he was the 'initiator' of a discourse between heaven and earth. The allusion was instead to the ruler's claims to be a *muhẓẓ*, a 'reviver' of the *Sharī'a*. With the revival of the Holy Law, 'Alā' al-Dīn restored the authority of God's Word on earth. Muslims once again acknowledged the omnipotence of Allah in prayer, and the verses of the Qur'ān recited by Muslims wafted from earth to heaven, only to return as a benediction, symbolically traversing the arches of the *mihṛāb* wall. It was for the fulfilment of the compact of obedience between God and His creatures, that Allah had chosen 'Alā' al-Dīn as his deputy on earth (*khalīfa*), and the iconography of the *masjid-i jāmi'* represented this relationship.

Baranī and Rethinking 'Alā' al-Dīn Khalajī's Merits

'Alā' al-Dīn succeeded in depicting himself as a Sultan whose major accomplishment was the restoration and preservation of the *Sharī'a*. He apparently followed this path because of his Moses- and Solomon-like personal qualities, because he was like Alexander in virtue, a sage, a jurist, and a special associate of God. The problem is that the Sultan's claims are

³² The English form 'between heaven and earth', signifying distance or a contrast between polar opposites is inverted and represented in Persian as *miyān zamīn wa āsmān*. Amīr Khusrāu used the conventional literary allusion in this sense to signify proximity between contrasting, distant participants. This statement needs to be dissociated from his earlier more problematic formulation where the relationship between unequal partners was represented by the peramulation of the Qur'ān from earth to heaven and back.

³³ Ibid.

seemingly unsupported and unremarked by the literature of his times. Certainly it is easy enough to ignore the writings of Amīr Khusrāu as the work of a court-panegyrist, who would but write platitudes, no matter how far-fetched, as long as they satisfied his patron. But what is ignored in any hasty dismissal of the *Khaṣṣā' in al-Futūḥ*, is the manner in which the text is able to unravel and follow the discursive logic of the iconography of the Delhi *masjid-i jāmi'*. There is no evidence in Amīr Khusrāu's work to suggest that he read (or was interested in reading) 'Alā' al-Dīn Khalajī's epigraphs; yet the poet was able to approximate their intent with uncanny regularity.

If Amīr Khusrāu is any guide, 'Alā' al-Dīn certainly had reason to be satisfied with his ability to communicate his moral claims to authority. But perhaps even more than the writings of a eulogist, it is the responses of a detractor which may serve to elucidate the extent to which 'Alā' al-Dīn's discourses touched a chord with a larger population and sometimes merited a spirited reply.

The record of the historian Ziyā' al-Dīn Baranī, for instance, was in direct contrast to the memory that 'Alā' al-Dīn Khalajī wished to perpetuate for himself. In the two recensions of his *Tārīkh* completed in the late 750s/1350s,³⁴ Baranī is forthright in stating that the Sultan was illiterate and ignorant of Islam.³⁵ As proof, Baranī cited the Sultan's own conversations where he confessed his ignorance of the *Sharī'a*.³⁶ But as Baranī was quick to note, this lacuna in his personal education did not deter 'Alā' al-Dīn from espousing absurd pretensions of fashioning another body of religious precepts, *dīni wa mazhabī digar paidā kunam*. According to Baranī it was fortunate that his uncle 'Alā' al-Mulk managed to dissuade the monarch from this foolish enterprise, and impressed on him that religion and the *Sharī'a* were concerns of the Prophet and not of the Sultan.³⁷ The advice must have worked, because later in his reign, as Baranī records, 'Alā' al-

³⁴ Baranī's first recension of the *Tārīkh* covered events to 756/1355; the second recension continued until 758/1357. The first recension, still in manuscript form, is in the personal collection of Simon Digby (MS. 157), the Bodleian Library, Oxford (Elliot Collection, no. 353), and Raza Library, Rampur. The second recension was edited and published by Saiyid Ahmad Khan in 1860-2. The two recensions have major discrepancies for the reign of Muhammad Shāh Tughluq (725-52/1325-51); for the earlier period I have used I.H. Siddiqui, 'Baranī's Account of the Sultans of Delhi in the First Version of *Tārīkh-i Firuzshahi*', in I.H. Siddiqui, *Perso-Arabic Sources of Information on the Life and Conditions in the Sultanate of Delhi*, Delhi, 1992, pp. 151-66.

³⁵ Baranī, *Tārīkh-i Firuz Shāhī*, pp. 262, 289.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 296.

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 262-7.

Dīn confessed that he had little inclination to associate with the 'Ulamā'; he acknowledged that worldly government and the *Sharī'a* occupied distinct, separate realms.³⁸

Baranī recorded the Sultan's profane eccentricities; the achievements of the monarch were peppered by accounts of his irreligiosity. While 'Alā' al-Dīn may have constructed the *masjid-i jāmi'* and the great *hawz-i 'Alā'ī* in Delhi,³⁹ he actually never read the *namāz*, and was seldom present during the Friday congregational prayers.⁴⁰ His disregard for the tenets of Islam was apparent to pious Muslims, and it was for this reason that the renowned *ḥadīth* scholar Maulānā Shams al-Dīn Turk chose not to visit Delhi.⁴¹

Yet, Baranī concedes that the impious monarch did have a few accomplishments to his credit. Not the least of these were the chastisement of 'Hindus' and the reduction of prices of essential goods.⁴² These were, however, the personal achievements of the Sultan, and they might have saved him from the wrath of God on the Day of Judgement. But what of the residents of Delhi? Without any religious guidance, the residents of the capital should have suffered the fires of hell and indeed Maulānā Shams al-Dīn Turk had wondered why a town which had forsaken the *Sharī'a* was not reduced to a pile of ruins.⁴³ In Baranī's narrative, Maulānā Shams al-Dīn's query remained rhetorical and served as a device to lead the author in a search for the actual saviour of Muslims. This happened to be Zayn al-Dīn Baranī's hero, the pious saint Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā', the other 'Sultan' of Delhi, and the guide and protector of its residents.⁴⁴

Baranī's criticisms of the personal qualities, and therefore the rule, of 'Alā' al-Dīn Khalajī, draw greater significance once they have Amīr Khusrāu and the Delhi Sultan's epigraphs as context. Rather than a purely prejudiced record of 'Alā' al-Dīn Khalajī, Baranī's narrative systematically addressed and destroyed the Delhi Sultan's claims to moral authority. The seriousness with which 'Alā' al-Dīn's measures, not merely his assertions, need to be re-evaluated becomes clearer when we look at Baranī's *Ḥasrat-nāma*. In this text the author has Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā' complain about the

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 289, 296.

³⁹ Baranī, *Tārīkh-i Firūz Shāhī*, Bodleian MS., fol. 125a, cited by Siddiqui, 'Baranī's Account of the Sultans of Delhi ...', p. 152.

⁴⁰ Baranī, *Tārīkh-i Firūz Shāhī*, ed. Khān, p. 297.

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 297-9.

⁴² Ibid., pp. 302-20.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 299.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 325.

level of impiety in Delhi where 'the narrations of *fiqh* had been preferred to *ḥadīth*; and the *ḥadīth* of the Shāfi'ī school had been ignored. What would be the fate of a city where such insolence was committed? How could it be flourished?'⁴⁵ To my mind, this was Baranī's comment on 'Alā' al-Dīn's efforts to restore, and renew the *Sharī'a*, indeed, 'found' the Hanafi school at the expense of the other *madhabs*. In Baranī's representation, however, this was an impious development, and it was Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā', the paragon of virtue, who had the courage to criticize the Sultan's measures.

In the *Tārīkh-i Firūz Shāhī*, Baranī had been equally direct. He mocked 'Alā' al-Dīn's ambitions to establish an alternate school of law and religious precepts (*ḍīnī wa mazhabī digar*). He subsequently re-evaluated the Sultan's reign, diminishing his role in the successful conclusion of his major political projects. The mysterious raising of the siege and the withdrawal of the Mongol Chaghtayid horde from Delhi was a miracle of God who had heard the prayers of his special friend, Nizām al-Dīn. The second Alexander and his wall of iron played an insignificant role in repelling the *yūjūj wa mājūj*.⁴⁶ And as for the 'secret understanding' with God of which 'Alā' al-Dīn and Amīr Khusrāu made so much, Baranī suggested that rather than the Sultan, the relationship was between the Sufi and God. Since the saint was a friend and beloved of God, His blessings were upon the residents of Delhi and they profited from the success of 'Alā' al-Dīn's administrative achievements. The price regulations of the Sultan were therefore successful only because of Nizām al-Dīn's concern for the material well being of his congregation, the residents of Delhi.⁴⁷

While acknowledging the king's several military and administrative achievements, Baranī discounts his role in their success and instead gives credit to the 'Sultan of Saints'. Thus Baranī's representation provides an alternative account of 'Alā' al-Dīn which contradicts all his pietistic and moral claims to authority. The hero was displaced in Baranī's account and

⁴⁵ The *Ḥasrat-nāma* is no longer extant in its complete version. Some portions of it were cited by Amīr Khusrāu in his *Siyar al-Awliyā'*. I have quoted from the edited and vastly abbreviated translation of Digby, 'The Sufi Shaykh and the Sultan ...', p. 73, which preserves the sense of the original text. See Amīr Khusrāu, *Siyar al-Awliyā'*, ed. S.M. Ghūrī, Lahore, 1978, pp. 541-2.

⁴⁶ Baranī, *Tārīkh-i Firūz Shāhī*, pp. 302, 325.

⁴⁷ See in particular ibid., p. 325, where Baranī explained to his readers that all the victories and administrative regulations of Sultan 'Alā' al-Dīn which were of profit to his subjects, were successful only because of Shaikh Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā's blessings. Irfan Habib, who argued for the factual accuracy and sound analysis of Baranī in all 'substantive matters', obviously did not include Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā' within this caveat. See I. Habib, 'The Price Regulations of 'Alā' al-Dīn Khalajī ...', p. 393.

it is Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā', who is called the 'actual' Sultan, the 'friend', not 'deputy', of God.

Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā', and the Fawā'id al-Fu'ād

Just as Amīr Khusrāu had developed the significance of 'Alā' al-Dīn Khalajī's claims in the Delhi *masjid-i jāmi'*, Baranī's observations on him and Nizām al-Dīn reflect the extent to which his own opinions were influenced by the latter. The primary source which carried the substance of the Shaikh's teachings was the *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād* of Amīr Ḥasan Sijzī. This was a text written in the *maflūzāt* tradition and contained a record of the Shaikh's public discourses at assemblies where the author had been present.

Amīr Ḥasan Sijzī was a reputed author, and his skills were more than evident in his judicious choice of the *maflūzāt* as a literary genre. The *maflūzāt* had hitherto not been considered a suitable form for narrating the teachings of a great Sufi; it was *ishārāt*, treatise on mystical instruction, and *tagkirāt*, biographical narrative, which were preferred.⁴⁸ *Maflūzāt* texts, in the form of imaginary, fictional records of the discourses of Sufi masters to their disciples, were, however, an extremely popular genre in thirteenth-century north India.⁴⁹ By choosing a popular mode rather than the formal, conventional genre, Amīr Ḥasan Sijzī tapped into a huge pre-existing demand for this kind of literature. But he was also careful to ensure that the *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād* would distinguish itself from the mass of *maflūzāt* in circulation. Unlike the others, Sijzī emphasized that his text was an authentic record of Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā's conversations, a record which had been edited by the great Shaikh himself.⁵⁰

This would have been insufficient, in itself, to guarantee the popularity of the text, and it was here that the literary skills of the author raised the stature of the *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād* beyond its peers. Most *maflūzāt* written before the *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād* were compilations of teachers' instructions, and thus largely flat monologues. Sijzī, on the other hand, transformed this into an interactive record, where Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā responded to

⁴⁸ See Lawrence, *Notes from a Distant Flute* ..., pp. 20-44.

⁴⁹ See Sijzī, *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād*, pp. 49, 76, and Habib, 'Chishtī Mystics Records ...'. Sijzī's remarks about the presence of texts which carried the teachings of the early saints and Bābā Farīd, and his desire to emulate these works in his own *maflūzāt* were overlooked by Ernst, *Eternal Garden* ..., p. 77. In fact, Sijzī also mentions Nizām al-Dīn's comments that these were spurious texts. See, *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād*, p. 49.

⁵⁰ The point was made in an elaborate account by Sijzī, *ibid*.

queries posed by members of his audience, joked, recounted anecdotes, and asked individuals about their personal welfare. It was an extraordinarily intimate account, transporting reader and listener to the environs of the Shaikh's assemblies. The narrative skills of the author need to be appreciated because Sijzī had clarified that he took no notes when the Shaikh spoke to his disciples; he wrote them down later, from memory, at that time much of what he remembered was also rearranged to provide greater coherence to the text. There were also occasions when Sijzī had either misunderstood or failed to comprehend his teacher's conversation. On those occasions Nizām al-Dīn corrected and provided the missing information.⁵¹ Yet, Sijzī manages to capture the 'orality', the moods and the substance of the discussion in his master's assemblies.⁵² It is a record which reflects the authorship of both master and pupil, the former providing the substance, the latter the literary form.

Sijzī's narrative technique was important in the making of Nizām al-Dīn's discursive statements, not merely because of its easy, comprehensible, lively style, but even more because of its ability to provide space for questions, discussions and disagreements. His success in conveying the nature of the interaction between the audience and the Shaikh allowed Sijzī the opportunity to provide the reader with a sense of the variety of different issues which were placed before Nizām al-Dīn, and his competence in unravelling the most complex problem. These were the opportunities when the saint displayed his knowledge of law and theology, and they were also the occasions when he could emphasize his own dicta.

The elaboration of Nizām al-Dīn's understanding of the mystical path and his instructions on how the laity needed to conduct themselves was the purpose of the *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād*. But rather than depict him as a pedagogue, Sijzī suggested that it was the congregation who solicited his opinions, an appropriate testimony to the greatness of the saint. The text was also littered with references to the Prophet, the Medianian companions, great preceptors of diverse backgrounds, and Bābā Farīd, Nizām al-Dīn's immediate spiritual master. Anecdotes about such heroes served to lend authority to the Shaikh's teachings and depict Nizām al-Dīn and his *ṭarīqa* as the epitome of all the perfect practices in the past. Nizām al-Dīn's teachings were 'a guide' which, because of their comprehensiveness, made all others paths redundant.⁵³ As Sijzī put it,

⁵¹ *Ibid*.

⁵² This is well argued in the case of the *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād* by Ernst, *Eternal Garden* ..., pp. 63-8, 79-84.

⁵³ My emphasis on Sijzī's literary skill and his deliberate choice of a narrative style which

[in your discourses] what exhortation and advice and encouragement to submit, *cheh wa'z wa naṣīhat wa targhīb dar iā'āt*, what stories of saints and their spiritual conditions, . . . [I heard]. . . I wanted to make [your instructions] the foundation of this beggar's life, *dastūr-i ḥāl-i in bī-chāra*, in fact, a guide for this indigent person, *daft-i rāh-i in shikasta*.⁵⁴

Amīr Ḥasan Sijzī's literary accomplishments established the value of the *mafiḥzāt* as a genre of Sufi discourse. His text carried a personable portrait of Nizām al-Dīn, whose teachings and guidance were always close at hand to his disciples, an individual beloved of God and an embodiment of virtue, whose conversations and comportment defined a *ṭarīqa* of historical validity; a path which Muslims could safely tread. Because of these virtues, Sijzī argued, Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā' was the Ṣultan of Saints, the Axis of the World, the Ṣultan of the Shaikhs and the Pious (*Sulṭān al-Awliyā'*, *Quṭb al-Ālam*, *Sulṭān al-Mashāikh wa al-ʿarīfīn*), the Protector and Lord of Muslims, a saint who may have lacked a kingdom in the conventional sense but ruled, instead, over the hearts and minds of people.⁵⁵ Although it was managed very gently and without undue sermonizing, Nizām al-Dīn's teachings envisaged an exclusive moral right to guide and govern the thoughts and conduct of his disciples; these beliefs left little space for 'Alā' al-Dīn Khalajī, the other Ṣultan of Delhi.

appropriated a host of prestigious voices to create the authoritative persona of Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā', are minimized by Ernst, *Eternal Garden* . . . pp. 78-84. Nor am I entirely in agreement with Ernst's observation regarding the sharp decline in the 'oral' component of the *mafiḥzāt* produced after 1400. I do not believe that such a linear development in narrative techniques occurred uniformly in the subcontinent. On the other hand, I find Ernst's qualitative differentiation of the *mafiḥzāt*—as 'original' (in the sense of an 'initiate' discourse) and 'retrospective'—far more useful (p. 83 in particular). The oral discursive mode is especially present in the *mafiḥzāt* of Sufis attempting to elaborate the outlines of their mystical path and their 'initiate' genealogy'. Hence the parallel between Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā' and Burhān al-Dīn's collateral Chishtī lineage in the Deccan. The retrospective *mafiḥzāt*—and in this I would include as early a text as the *Khayr al-Majlis*—were written when the mystical genealogy of the *silṣila* already possessed form and coherence. These texts share with the *ṭarīqat*, a sermonizing, narrative mode and this overwhelms the earlier guiding, interactive, conversational tone of the 'initiate' *mafiḥzāt*. For a useful study of 'orality' in Yahyā Manerī's *Khawān-i pūr nī'mat*, see especially Chapter 3, 'Transcribing a Conversation: the Annexation of Orality', in P. K. Jha, 'Sharaf al-Dīn Manerī's Khawān-i pūr Nī'mat: Studying Bihar through a Fourteenth Century Malfūz', Delhi University, History Department, unpublished M.Phil. dissertation, 1997.

⁵⁴ Sijzī, *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād*, p. 49.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 369.

The Fawā'id al-Fu'ād and Nizām al-Dīn's Claims to Authority

Nizām al-Dīn's conversations show the Shaikh as an extremely approachable, affable personality, but the narrative of the assemblies in Sijzī's text also clarifies that the rituals of seniority and the 'court ceremonial' of kissing the saint's feet, *pā'ibūs*, were meticulously performed by the members of the congregation.⁵⁶ Nizām al-Dīn himself explained the powers inherent in a *pīr*:

In every instance, the *pīr*, must know the precepts of the Law, the Path, and the Truth (*ahkām-i Sharʿa, wa ṭarīqat, wa ḥaqīqat*). And since the *pīr* is of this nature, he never commands anything not prescribed by law, *nā-mashrūʿ naʿfarmāyad*. And if he commands something on which there is a difference of [legal] opinions (*mukhtalif fi-hi*), in other words, according to some it is lawful, [but] unlawful to some others, then the *murīd* (student), must do what the *pīr* has commanded because [the saint] must have given the command on the basis of some precedent (*bar qaul-i kasf*). Even if some may dispute this [command], the disciple must act according to the instructions of the *pīr*.⁵⁷

According to Nizām al-Dīn, it was both the *pīr*'s learning and an intuitive knowledge of God's Law that gave him the authority to command. There were obvious parallels here between his and 'Alā' al-Dīn's claims to be a jurist and an 'elucidator of the arguments of [religious] interpretation'. But Nizām al-Dīn went much further than arguing for a divine dispensation to command; he could actually forgive a sinner. When Sijzī asked that surely identifying sin and forgiving a sinner were capacities possessed only by God, Nizām al-Dīn reminded his disciple of the Shaikh's special proximity to God.

At this point I (Sijzī) inquired: 'due to his extreme generosity, *ghāyat-i karmī*, the *pīr* may forgive the sins of a disciple, *khaṭā' ī murīd ʿafū farmāyad*, but how would God Almighty regard that sin, *ān khaṭā' chigūna pasandad*, and how would He pardon the sinner?' He (the master) replied: '[since] the *pīr* pardons with the permission of God, *ba iẓn-i ḥaqq*, it is God who [actually] pardons, *ḥaqq ʿafū farmāyad*.'⁵⁸

These were formidable claims and, as in the case of the ruler's discursive statements, intriguing in the manner in which they might have been

⁵⁶ Despite some personal reservations, Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā' explained that he accepted the ritual of prostration (*ṣijda, pā'ibūs*) from disciples because his spiritual master, Bābā Farīd, had allowed it. Ibid., p. 364.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 250.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 249.

received in Delhi. The degree of respect and appreciation of saintliness accorded to Nizām al-Dīn in a large number of the surviving Persian texts of the fourteenth century is impressive. We have already had a chance to evaluate Ziyā' al-Dīn Baranī's sentiments regarding his Shaikh. Slightly more surprising might be the following poem written by Amīr Khusrāu about his spiritual master.⁵⁰

An emperor in an indigent's cell,
dar hujra'i faqr bāshāhī,

A 'Refuge of the World' for the heart of the world,
dar 'ālam-i dil jahān panāhī,

A King of Kings without throne or crown,
Shāhanshah bī-sarīr wa bī-tāj,

With kings in need of the dust of his feet,
*Shāhānash ba-khāk-i pā' i muhtāj.*⁵¹

Amīr Khusrāu may have celebrated his master's exalted claims of spiritual paramourcy, but there was no gainsaying the fact that in his poetry Nizām al-Dīn was the greater, but still, only one of two Sultans in Delhi. Whether it was Baranī's *Tārīkh-i Firūz Shāhī*, Amīr Khusrāu's poetry, or the Chishtī biographical compendium of saints, the *Siyar al-Awliyā'* of Amīr Khwurd each of the texts went to some trouble to weigh the respective qualities of the two 'rulers' and pronounce judgement in favour of the 'Sultan of the Shaikhs'. 'Alā' al-Dīn's presence was palpable even if it was denied ultimate authority.

The narrative strategy of Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā' and Amīr Hasan Sijzī was very different in the *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād*. The Sufi saint's conversations did not mention 'Alā' al-Dīn even once; it was as if the Khilajī monarch

⁵⁰ Khusrāu was a popular eulogist, and produced texts extolling the victories of Jalāl al-Dīn Khilajī, 'Alā' al-Dīn Khilajī, and Ghiyāth al-Dīn Tughluq. In many of his other works he included poems of praise for Sultans and princes like Kaiqubād, Bughra Khān, Khizr Khān, and Qutb al-Dīn Mubārak Shāh Khilajī. Unlike Baranī, however, Amīr Khusrāu was remarkably successful in balancing courtly life and mystical leanings. His eulogies for the Sultans, although successful in capturing the discourse of the monarch, were self-conscious testimonials of his literary craft, and were only occasionally interpolated with his own beliefs. Yet Amīr Khusrāu also wrote on mystical love, his own youth, or poems which concerned his close friend and spiritual guide Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā'. These sometimes carried a personal testament frequently absent in his other writings.

⁵¹ Khwurd, *Siyar al-Awliyā'*, p. 140. The poem was a part of Amīr Khusrāu's *Majmūn Laylā*, ed. M. Habib al-Rahmān Khān, p. 13, and cited by Digby. 'The Sufi Shaykh and the Sultan ...', p. 72 and n. 13. I have used Digby's translation with a minor modification.

had never existed. This lacuna was particularly significant because some of the earlier Sultans—Iltutmish, Raziyyā, Nāsir al-Dīn, and Balban—were remembered in the *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād*. 'Alā' al-Dīn, however, could not simply be wished away, not even by a Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā'. Instead of taking up the cudgels against the ruler and running the risk of giving him even a negative credence, the Sufi saint criticized the inadequacy of the existing text-bound, superficial understanding of the *Sharī'a*. This was actually a far more direct and powerful strategy of challenging 'Alā' al-Dīn because the latter had constructed the moral foundations for his authority on his claims to be a scholar, jurist and reviver of the *Sharī'a*.

Ironically, both ruler and saint argued that they were the protectors and strengtheners of the *Sharī'a*. The latter, however, caricatured the outward ritualistic understanding of the Holy Law, an interpretation taught by the 'Ulamā in the *madrasas* and mosques constructed by the Sultan. For the saint, the intellect obscured the real meaning of God's message which only the emotional and intuitive faith of the Sufi could actually experience. Some of these differences were explained by Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā':

The 'Ulamā' are the people of intellect, *ahl-i 'aql*, the *derwishes* are the people of love, *ahl-i 'ishq*, the intellect of the 'Ulamā' overpowers, *ghālib*, [their sentiment of] love, [whereas] the [emotion] of [divine] love of these mystics triumphs over their intellect.⁵²

The emphasis on building mosques, pulpits and schools was scorned by the mystic because their constructors had misunderstood the entire meaning of prayer. In an important anecdote concerning the Sufi Jalāl al-Dīn Tabrizī and Qāzī Kamāl al-Dīn Ja'farī, the *hākim* of Badaun, the saint belittled the pedantic computations of the 'Ulamā' to ascertain the correct location of the Ka'ba in Mecca and the *qibla*, the direction they should face while praying. Nizām al-Dīn explained that Sufis relied on their intuitive genius to guide them in the direction of the Almighty. On those occasions when Sufis did read their prayers in congregation, they could abstain, or interrupt an *imām* found incompetent. Although the 'Ulamā' criticized this conduct as contrary to the *aḥkām-i Sharī'a*, Nizām al-Dīn argued that when mystics were guided by their 'inner light' (*nūr-i bātin*), their actions were not merely legitimate but outside the purview of the religious scholars.⁵³ Ultimately, the 'beloved' had graduated to a stage beyond the superficial meanings of words. Scholars, on the other hand, were only slight improvements on children; dragged unwillingly to the mosque to

⁵² Sijzī, *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād*, p. 226.

⁵³ Ibid., pp. 399-400, 401-2.

learn the alphabet, they had grasped the meanings of words but not yet their real significance.⁶³

Nizām al-Dīn reconstituted the *Shariʿa* piety of the *ʿUlamāʾ*, diminishing the importance of conventional rituals associated with worship; he stressed instead the importance of the spiritual master as a guide and intercessor. In contrast to the Muslim who engaged in extreme devotion, chanted rosary beads, recited countless invocations and went on pilgrimage to Mecca (*ṭarīq-i biyyār bāshad wa tasbīḥ wa aṭrād biʾandāzish wa ḥajj karīlah*), those who venerated and trusted the Sufi saint gained immediate spiritual benefit.⁶⁴ Since no ritual obligation required of Muslims was as important as the *ṭarīq*, even the axial space occupied by Mecca was open to question. Without actually partaking in any discussion of 'Alāʾ al-Dīn's virtues as a ruler, Nizām al-Dīn trivialized the repertory of beliefs which lent credence to 'Alāʾ al-Dīn's discursive statements. And this included the significance that the Delhi Sultan had attached to his constructions in the Delhi *masjid-i jāmiʿ*.

Disputing Authority and Redefining the Masjid-i Jāmiʿ

'Alāʾ al-Dīn Khalajī's inscriptions on the 'Alāʾī Darwāza suggest that the congregational mosque occupied a hallowed spot in the geography of Islam because it was like the Dome of the Rock mosque in Jerusalem or *bait al-nuqaddas* (also known as) the 'Distant Mosque', *masjid al-aqsā*.⁶⁵ The special veneration for the Dome of the Rock mosque in the twelfth century was derived from the popular belief that it was the site to which Muhammad was miraculously transported from Mecca, prior to his ascension (*miʾrāʿ*), to heaven.⁶⁶ 'Alāʾ al-Dīn would probably have been pleased if visitors to the mosque had independently made the parallel between the Dome of the Rock mosque and the one in Delhi, with its towering minaret. In case they had missed the iconic significance of the structure, the Sultan spelled out the analogy for them in his inscriptions, a point driven home further by the Qur'ānic verse, XVII: 1, inscribed on the

⁶³ Ibid., pp. 257-8.

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 207-8.

⁶⁵ Inscriptions on the left pier, eastern door, and the outer arch, southern door, Yazdani, 'Inscriptions ...', pp. 25, 27.

⁶⁶ For the historical development of this belief see the classic study of the Dome of the Rock by O. Grabar, *The Formation of Islamic Art*, New Haven, rpt., 1977, pp. 45-67 andidem, 'The Meaning of the Dome of the Rock', in D. Hopwood, ed., *Studies in Arab History, the Antonius Lectures, 1978-87*, London, 1990, pp. 151-63.

gateway: 'Glory be to Him who carried His servant by night from the Holy Mosque (in Mecca) to the Distant Mosque'.⁶⁷

The curious thing was that after making the parallel, the Sultan immediately withdrew it. His inscription goes on to note that actually the *masjid-i jāmiʿ* was not the Dome of the Rock but the second *bait al-maʾmūr*, the heavenly prototype of the Holy Mosque in Mecca.⁶⁸ This analogy was also supported by Amīr Khusrāu who argued in his *Khuṣṣāʾ al-Futūḥ* that 'Alāʾ al-Dīn's mosque was so prepossessing that the fourth heaven called it a second *bait al-maʾmūr*.⁶⁹ In medieval Islamic cosmology, Mecca was the centre, the navel of the earth, and the Ka'ba, the place where the heavens and earth met. If the Ka'ba was the sacred sanctuary, the house of God on earth, its prototype, the *bait al-maʾmūr*, was directly above it in heaven, elevated by God during the floods which ravaged earth in the time of Noah. According to 'Alāʾ al-Dīn's inscriptions, the Delhi mosque might seem like the Distant Mosque in Jerusalem, but was actually the hallowed *bait al-maʾmūr*. Taken together with his other claims to a close relationship with God, 'Alāʾ al-Dīn argued that his mosque was the *axis mundi*, a fact, which in Amīr Khusrāu's rendition, the heavens themselves had recognized.

Not surprisingly, Nizām al-Dīn Awliyāʾ questioned all this. No physical site, not the *bait al-maʾmūr* or the *bait al-nuqaddas*, enabled Muslims the delight of experiencing God's majesty, and none of the hallowed mosques in Islamdom could compete with the bliss gained from praying in the company of one's *ṭarīq*. This theme was the subject of a number of conversations reported by Sijzī, but the episode which best encapsulates his ideas is about Khwāja Junayd Baghdādī and four holy men who visited him just before a festival. The Sufi saint reportedly asked his visitors where they would read their *ṭarīd* prayers, and was unimpressed as three of them answered, respectively, Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem. The fourth, however, replied that during *ṭarīd* prayers he would remain in Baghdad in the service of his *ṭarīq*. According to Nizām al-Dīn Awliyāʾ's story, it was this individual who was recognized by the saint as the most devout, knowledgeable and virtuous of the four.⁷⁰ In a similar fashion, the rejection of Mecca as the axis of the Muslim world was central in the story concerning the execution of a disciple of the Sufi Khwāja Ajall Shīrāzī.

⁶⁷ Inscription on the left pier, eastern door, Yazdani, 'Inscriptions ...', p. 25.

⁶⁸ Epigraph on the outer arch, eastern door, *ibid.*, p. 27. The inscription noted 'in masjid bait al-Muqaddas mashhūr balkeh jāmiʿ bait al-maʾmūr ast'.

⁶⁹ ... *siphir-i chahārūm dawam bait maʾmūrah khwānād* ... See Khusrāu, *Khuṣṣāʾ al-Futūḥ*, p. 23.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

Nizām al-Dīn explained that the condemned man wanted to be executed facing the Ka'ba in Mecca, until he realized that this meant that he would have to turn his back on his *pīr*'s grave. He turned his back to Mecca, ignored traditional practice and the admonitions of the executioner, and died facing the grave of his spiritual master. Mecca was still important for the disciple, but the centre of the world was his *pīr*, his intercessor with God on the Day of Judgement.⁷¹

The systematic dismantling of the symbols which supported 'Alā' al-Dīn's monumental claims to authority should not lead us to assume that Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā' questioned the value of congregational prayer; these were always very important for him. But he did want to emphasize that these prayers derived their significance from the 'pure intent' of the believer and the guidance of his spiritual master. The avowed piety of the *imām*, the individual who was learned in the scriptures and rituals and led the congregation in prayer, or the magnificent environment of the mosque, did not in themselves promise spiritual benefit. In this context, he was explicit about his opinion of the *masjid-i jāmi'*. On one occasion, when he was explaining the role of saints in conferring blessings, he said,

Wherever place there might be, it is scented by their blessed feet. Take, for example, the Delhi *masjid-i jāmi'*. The feet of so many saints and pious have trod there, which is why that place has so much tranquillity.⁷²

In other words, Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā' clarified that 'Alā' al-Dīn's mosque would have remained a pile of stones and mortar had the Sufi saints not transformed it. It was important to make this point because at least some visitors to the mosque were obviously impressed by its pious environment. Nizām al-Dīn wanted to make sure that his audience realized that the 'tranquillity' of the place originated in the blessings of saints of God and not the efforts of the Delhi Sultan.

'Alā' al-Dīn could not have disagreed more. All of his epigraphs on the structure harped on his role as the reviver and protector of the *Sharī'a*, because he had constructed mosques and schools. These were signs of his probity as a Muslim monarch, and God had specially blessed him with His favour. His inscription on the left pier of the south door to the mosque therefore argued:

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 99.

⁷² Sijzi, *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād*, pp. 18-19: 'sukhan dar barkat-i qadām-i nik mardān ufiād: *farmīd keh har nāuzar keh hast, ba-yumn-i aqdam-i tishān mura'uwaḥ ast, chūnāncheh masjid-i jāmi' Delhi. Ba'd az ān farmīd keh, aqdam-i chand awliyā' wa buzurgān ānya rastādah bāshad keh ān maqām chūnān rēḥat dārad.*'

he ('Alā' al-Dīn) built this mosque, which is the mosque of paradise, for saints and ... men of piety and a place of assembly of the eminent angels, and an edifice inhabited by the souls of the chief Prophets.⁷³

'Alā' al-Dīn did not question the spiritual authority of the saints of God (*awliyā'*), but argued that together with angels and Prophets, their presence in his *masjid* was on account of the sacredness of the mosque. It was the Delhi Sultan's special relationship with God and His blessings which had made it a hallowed precinct. Rather than the congregation lending significance to the mosque, the pious congregated there because of its holy character and accepted the dictates of the *Sharī'a* which it represented.

Conclusion

The congregational mosque was a symbol of the power and unity of the Muslim community, a unity which 'Alā' al-Dīn sought to enforce through the Hanafi school of law. Other than his myriad personal qualities, this monarch also claimed a divine dispensation to enforce the Holy Law. Had all Muslims shared a common understanding of the Holy Law, 'Alā' al-Dīn would have won universal applause, but this was not the case. There was considerable opposition, and Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā' s discourses, for one, elaborated an alternate universe of Islam, weakening the structures supporting 'Alā' al-Dīn's claims to moral authority. But the saint did not construct a 'competing' ideology; his was the authoritative version of Islam. For many Muslims in the fourteenth century, including the likes of Amīr Hasan Sijzi and Ziya' al-Dīn Baranī, it was Nizām al-Dīn who was the Sultan of Delhi and who could suggest that this ostentatious monument built by the ignorant rulers of Delhi, was transformed into a sacred site because Sufis of his ilk graced its environs.

The moral claims of the Sultan and the Sufi saint to be the protectors and guides of the Muslim community were sustained by contrary interpretations of Islam, the discordance reflecting the social and doctrinal complexities which existed within the Muslim community during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Certainly they were representative of two dominant, sometimes hostile but always competing, systems of thought that had

⁷³ Inscription on the south door, left pier 'binā farmūd īn masjid ī janānī, *zumreh-yi awliyā' wa ... ṭabaqah-i atiqiyā' wa majma' malā'ik-i kirām wa mahzar-i arwāh-i anbiyā'-yi 'izām ast.* I have followed the epigraph as it was transcribed in Page, *An Historical Memoir on the Qutb*, p. 37. In this case, Page's reading was less ambitious, but clearer than Yazdani's (p. 27, and plate VIII).

emerged by the turn of the century.⁷⁴ We are able to grasp the nature of their respective discourses only because their records were preserved for posterity.

We need to be cautious, however, in presuming any easy, binary juxtaposition of beliefs—Sufi mystical ideas as opposed to *Shariʿa* textual rigour—for this period. Sufis and *ʿUlamāʾ* came in a variety of hues, and despite *ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn*'s and Nizām al-Dīn's efforts to synthesize them, there were other competing systems of thoughts as well at this time. Some of them are harder to decipher because their memory was hegemonized and suppressed in the written record.⁷⁵ Certainly, in the present study itself, it is *ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn*'s description of his rights to authority which need to be resurrected from the oblivion to which Nizām al-Dīn Awliyāʾ had sought to relegate it. Delhi did not accommodate the two Sultans with ease; neither of them was quite willing to accept the legitimate suzerainty of the other.

⁷⁴ But note the research of Digby, 'Qalandars and Related Groups ...', pp. 60-108, and his remarks on the reported conflict between the Chishtis and Firdausis in Delhi during Nizām al-Dīn Awliyāʾ's lifetime in, 'The Sufi Shaikh as a Source of Authority ...', pp. 63-7.

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