

# *The Mughals, the Sufi Shaikhs and the Formation of the Akbari Dispensation*

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## **Abstract**

This essay places Mughal–Sufi relationship within a larger sixteenth century context, focusing on the strategies the early Mughals adopted to build their power in India. It reviews the positions of the two important sufi groups, the Indian Chishtis and the Central Asian Naqshbandis, juxtaposing the political benefits or the loss that the Mughals saw in their associations with them. While the Naqshbandi worldview and the legacy of the legendary Ubaid Allah Ahrar clashed with their vision of power, in the Chishti ideology, on the other hand, they found a strong support for themselves. The Chishtis then had an edge at the time of Akbar. But the Naqshbandis under Khwaja Baqi Billah (d. 1603) continued in their endeavour to reinstate their place in Mughal India. The paper thus provides a backdrop and makes a plea for re-evaluating the debate on the ideology and politics of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi (d. 1624).

## **Introduction**

The authority exercised by the Mughal dynasty over much of northern India in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries depended in part on various forms of legitimacy that were provided to it from outside the narrow sphere of elite politics. To be sure, the Mughals were also able to rule for so long and with such success because they successfully managed a composite political elite made up of

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elements both from northern India and from the Deccan (as well as other 'peripheral' regions), and migrants from Central and West Asia. However, as with a number of dynasties of the Muslim world in the period, a crucial element in the strategies of rule that they adopted were their relations with religious figures of various sorts. This essay is an attempt to understand the changing relationship between the Mughal rulers and the Sufi shaikhs, focusing on the early days of the formation and consolidation of the Mughal state in India. The question of the Mughal–Sufi equation, as we know, has generally been discussed with reference to the Naqshbandi order. Scholars have devoted particular attention to Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi (d. 1624), the founder of the Mujaddidi branch of that order, his disciples and his ideology. Their questions have revolved around the extent and the nature of the influence of this group on seventeenth-century Mughal Indian politics.<sup>1</sup> There is no denying of the importance of this debate, and as a matter of fact, the present essay was initially motivated by the desire to contribute to it. In the course of my study of the relevant materials, however, I realized that I would be in a better position to re-evaluate this subject if I placed Mughal–sufi relationships within a larger sixteenth-century context and not limit the discussion to the Naqshbandi shaikhs alone.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This is true of almost all modern historians. Whether they have highlighted evidence to support, qualify or reject the validity of this proposition; the contours of the proposition, itself, has not shifted. See for example I. Habib, 'The political role of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi and Shah Waliullah' in *Enquiry*, Vol. 5, (1961), pp. 36–55; Aziz Ahmad, *Studies in Islamic Culture in the Indian Environment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 182–90; K.A. Nizami, 'Naqshbandi influence on Mughal rulers and politics' in *Islamic Culture*, Vol. 39 (1965), pp. 41–52; Yohanan Friedmann, *Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi: An Outline of his Thought and a Study of his Image in the Eyes of Posterity* (Montreal: McGill University, 1971); Fazlur Rahman, *Islam*, 2nd edition (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1979), p. 148; J.G.J. ter Haar, *Follower and Heir of the Prophet: Shaikh: Ahmad Sirhindi as a Mystic* (Leiden: Het Oosters Instituut, 1992); David W. Damrel, 'The 'Naqshbandi Reaction' reconsidered', in David Gilmartin and Bruce Lawrence (eds.), *Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamicate South Asia* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), pp. 176–98.

<sup>2</sup> S.A.A. Rizvi, 'Sixteenth century Naqshbandiyya leadership in India', in Marc Gaborieau, Alexandre Popovic and Thierry Zarcone (eds.), *Naqshbandis: Historical Development and Present Situation of a Muslim Mystical Order* (Istanbul-Paris: Institut Français d'Etudes Anatoliennes d'Istanbul, 1990), pp. 153–65; Stephen F. Dale, 'The legacy of the Timurids' in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 3rd Series, Vol. 8, No.1 (1998), pp. 43–58; and Arthur F. Buehler, 'The Naqshbandiyya in Timurid India: The Central Asian legacy' in *Journal of Islamic Studies*, Vol.7, No.2 (1996), pp. 209–28, all do provide useful details on the Naqshbandis' relations with the early Mughals. However, they do not discuss the complexities of the Mughals' encounters with Indian

The essay thus reviews the career, politics and ideology of Sufis who occupied a central position in the social and cultural life of Indian Muslims in the early-sixteenth century, the time when the Mughals conquered India and began to build up their power. Here I will describe in brief the political and doctrinal life of Shaikh 'Abd al-Quddus Gangohi (d. 1537), a leading Chishti shaikh of the time. Gangohi was the *pir* or preceptor, very nearly the royal *pir*, of the Afghans, the archrivals of the Mughals. How then did the Mughals deal with him? How did he reconcile himself with the new situation? Was there any change in his position, or later after his death, in the position of the other people and institutions related to the Chishti order? Can we explain the changes that did occur in terms of the evolving conditions in the wake of the establishment and consolidation of the Mughal empire? What was the response of the Mughals and why did it take the form it did? The essay also discusses the visit of the Central Asian Naqshbandi shaikhs to the Mughal court. Here besides some details of their relations with the early Indian Mughals, I also draw attention to the nature of their relations with the Timurid rulers in Central Asia. This has been done in an attempt to understand the problems that came up in the wake of their visits. I have thus asked if, with the Mughal conquest of India, these Naqshbandis shaikhs also saw the prospect of an extension of the domain of their power and if the legacy of the ideology and practice of Central Asian Naqshbandi *tasawwuf* hindered the progress of the building of the Mughal state in India, and created difficulties for the Mughals. I have hence examined in particular the connections between Akbar's new administrative measures on the one hand, and the Sufi shaikhs (whether Chishtis or Naqshbandis), on the other.

In the last section of the essay, I examine whether in the new conditions of Akbar's India, the Naqshbandis rearticulated their *tasawwuf* in a bid to renegotiate their relationship with the Mughals. It should be noted at the very outset that several details critical for our argument have been developed earlier, in particular by scholars of Central Asia. However, these same elements are reinterpreted here in the perspective of the development of Mughal Indian politics and religious culture. It is hoped that this will provide a more useful context for the questions often asked by historians of Mughal India.

Sufis, while Damrel's discussion of some Chishti Sufi rites and practices with reference to Sirhindi, is essentially meant to show his connections with the Chishtis and the similarities in their 'politics' and Sufi practices. Compare Damrel, 'The 'Naqshbandi Reaction' Reconsidered'.

## The Chishti Shaikhs, the Afghans and the Mughals

In the mid-1520s, when Zahir al-Din Muhammad Babur entered northern India with a plan to establish Mughal power in the subcontinent, Shaikh ‘Abd al-Quddus Gangohi, a member of the Sabiri branch of Chishti order, was probably the most noted Sufi shaikh there, with his deputies (*khalifas*), disciples (*murids*) and ordinary associates (*mutawassils*) spread over almost the entire upper northern Indian plain. They belonged to diverse groups, ranging from lowly weavers and peasants to the very high members of the political class, including the reigning monarch and many of his courtiers, nobles and commanders.<sup>3</sup> Gangohi’s early career was in Rudauli, in Awadh, where he was initiated into the Sabiri line of the Chishti order by Shaikh Muhammad, a grandson of the eminent Chishti Sabiri saint, Shaikh Ahmad ‘Abd al-Haqq of Rudauli (d. 1434). He moved to the Punjab in the wake of Rajput uprisings in Awadh following the death of Bahlol Lodi (r. 1451–88) and settled in the Afghan-dominated town of Shahabad, near Karnal, north of the Yamuna river. In Shahabad, Gangohi spent the most important period of his life, living there for over 38 years, building intimate affinity with the ruling Afghan king of the Lodi dynasty and his nobility. He had close relations with, and a special appreciation for, Sultan Sikandar Lodi (r. 1488–1517), for he, according to Sufi accounts at least, was generous to the ‘*ulama* and the pious, so that in his reign ‘in fear of his dreadful and dazzling sword, and because of the grandeur of his exalted kingly power, sinners and mischief mongers were totally annihilated (literally: disappeared into the darkness of night and inexistence)’.<sup>4</sup> We may however also note here that Sikandar Lodi, as the later chronicler Muhammad Qasim Firishta reports, was the first Muslim king to create facilities for Hindus to learn Persian, and thus be trained to take charge of several offices under the Persianate Muslim government.<sup>5</sup>

Gangohi, like many Afghan nobles of the time, was however unhappy with Ibrahim Lodi (r. 1517–26), though unlike them he did not

<sup>3</sup> For the weavers (*ha’ikan and safed-baf*) of Saharanpur and Thanesar as Gangohi’s disciples, see Muhammad Akram ibn Shaikh Muhammad ‘Ali ibn Shaikh Ilah Bakhsh, *Sawati’ al-Anwar*, British Library, India Office Library Ms, Ethé 654, fols. 370a and 385b.

<sup>4</sup> Shaikh Badhan ibn Rukun *alias* Miyan Khan ibn Qiwan al-Mulk Jaunpuri, *Maktubat-i Quddusiya* (Delhi: Matba’ Ahmadi, 1287 AH./1870), p. 45.

<sup>5</sup> Muhammad Qasim Firishta, *Tarikh-i Firishta*, Vol. I (Puna: Dar al-Imarah, 1247 AH./1832), p. 344; Urdu transl. ‘Abdul Hay Khwaja (Deoband: Maktaba-i Millat, 1983), p. 552.

welcome the Mughals, whom he saw as a divine scourge, set loose as a divine retribution in the world of the sinful Afghans. Indeed, the flourishing Afghan town where he lived with his family turned desolate with the news of the feared Mughal invasion of the region. He left Shahabad, moved farther to settle in Gangoh, on the eastern bank of the Yamuna river, away from the route of the invaders. But as he was nearly the sole royal *pir* of the Afghans, he was persuaded by his disciples to join with them in the Afghan camp, in order to bless them and pray for them in their imminent fight against the Mughals under Babur. Gangohi anticipated the Afghan defeat, thought of fleeing, but eventually managed only to send his family away to Gangoh. He was constrained to stay back with Ibrahim Lodi's army together with his eldest son, Shaikh Hamid and his servitor (*khadim*), Sayyid Raja. With the Lodi Sultan's defeat and death, the Sufi fell into the hands of the Mughals, who first forced him to undo his turban, which they then threw around the necks of his son and *khadim*. The elderly *pir* of the Afghans was then forced to walk on foot from Panipat to Delhi, a distance of some forty miles, while his son and *khadim* were tied to the saddle of a horse by the long turban of the Shaikh.<sup>6</sup> Soon after, he was released, and he then spent the last 11 years of his life in Gangoh, where he died in 1537.

In 1530, when Babur died, the Afghan struggle to regain their lost power was still unabated. According to the *Lata'if-i Quddusi*, the most detailed and reliable *tazkira* of the Shaikh, throughout the years of the Afghans' fight against Babur's son and successor, Humayun, Gangohi remained opposed to the Mughals. He even allegedly had support and admiration for Sultan Bahadur Shah of Gujarat, the arch-enemy of Humayun on the western frontiers of his domain. It is interesting to note here the details of two visions of one Dattu Sarwani, a noted Afghan disciple of Gangohi. One of these visions pertains to Humayun's campaigns in Gujarat. According to the *Lata'if-i Quddusi*, one night, when Sultan Bahadur Shah was in the port of Diu and Humayun had gone to Gujarat, threatening to capture that kingdom, the Shaikh appeared in Dattu's dream, commanding him to go to Gujarat, convey his greetings to the *pirs* there and give them the following message:

Humayun Padishah is destroying Islam. He makes no distinction between infidelity and Islam, plunders it all. I have come to the aid of Islam, and to

<sup>6</sup> Shaikh Rukn al-Din, *Lata'if-i Quddusi* (Delhi: Matba' Mujtaba'i, 1311 AH/1894), p. 64.

your aid, and if you agree, I shall come there, join you, and drive Humayun out of the country of Gujarat; and if it pleases you I shall go to the country of Mandu to drive him out from there and you may drive him out from Gujarat, so that Islam may have peace and rest.

Accordingly, Dattu reached Gujarat, and delivered the Shaikh's message first to Hazrat Shah Manjhan and then to Shaikh Ahmad Khattu, the two major sufi divines of the region. They both welcomed and endorsed the Shaikh's mission, promised their support, and requested him to come to them 'so that we may together drive away Humayun from both the country of Mandu and the country of Gujarat, in order that Islam may grow strong and there may be stability in the land'.<sup>7</sup>

The other vision concerns Sher Shah's battle against Humayun, in which the Afghans defeated the Mughals and made them finally flee from India in 1540. The text of the *Lata'if* reports (through the voice of Dattu):

When Sher Shah Sur and Humayun Padishah opposed each other on the banks of the Ganges, Humayun Padishah was on the side of the *qasba* of Bhojpur and Sher Shah was on the other side. In a general gathering, Humayun Padishah said, 'If this time I am victorious and the Afghans are defeated, I will not leave a single Afghan alive, even though he might be a child'. When I heard this story I was very worried. After this Humayun Padishah had a bridge of boats bound together, crossed the Ganges, and camped on the bank of the river. I continued worrying. Suddenly in a dream my *pir* and helper, Hazrat-i Qutb-i 'Alam appeared and said, 'Dattu, look at the way the royal tent of Sher Shah is now standing'. I saw that it was standing very high, but that the pegs of the tent ropes were undone in the camp of Humayun Padishah, and that the royal tent of Humayun Padishah had fallen down, so that the Mughals were scattering and fleeing. Humayun Padishah was rallying them, while saying 'Don't leave me alone'. He was lamenting and wandering around in a distressed and stunned state. 'Have you seen the state of the Padishah?' Hazrat-i Qutb-i 'Alam asked. 'I have seen it', I submitted. He then said, 'Victory is Sher Shah's, defeat is Humayun's. The support of the *pirs* is on the side of Sher Shah'.<sup>8</sup>

These visions reflect a kind of consciousness of the opportunities to try and upset the Mughals' position in Gujarat, Malwa or eastern India—opportunities which the most persistent of their Afghan

<sup>7</sup> *Lata'if-i Quddusi*, pp. 79–80. For an English translation, see Simon Digby, 'Dreams and reminiscences of Dattu Sarvani, a sixteenth century Indo-Afghan soldier', (in 2 Parts), in *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. 2, (1965), pp. 71–2. My translation of some of the words and phrases is different.

<sup>8</sup> *Lata'if-i Quddusi*, p. 83; Digby, 'Dreams and reminiscences', pp. 180–81.

opponents, including the dreamer Dattu, must have been observing with interest.<sup>9</sup> However, the fact that they were incorporated into Gangohi's *tazkira* and continued to be an integral part of it, shows the image of the Shaikh that Gangohi's descendants and disciples preferred to keep, even when, as we will see later, they vied with their rivals, the Naqshbandis, to have some influence in Mughal official circles.

Gangohi, however, also seems to have periodically tried to develop good relations with Mughal conquerors. We possess letters written by him to Babur, Humayun and also to a Mughal noble, Tardi Beg. Besides the routine contents that such letters transmit, namely exhortations for pious acts and generous care for the learned and the saintly, in his letter to Babur, Gangohi particularly projects himself as an orthodox Sunni advocate of a rather narrow and bigoted juristic version of the *shari'a*.<sup>10</sup> To some extent he contradicts here, an earlier position elaborated in his *Rushd Nama*.<sup>11</sup> Not much however can really be made of his apparently changed position, especially if we take into context the fluid and ambiguous political conditions in which these letters were written. Features of indigenous devotional religion in fact continued to be part of his *tasawwuf*. He also never gave up teaching the *Rushd Nama* to his disciples.<sup>12</sup>

As someone recovering from the trauma and humiliation of Mughal captivity, Gangohi's uncompromisingly bigoted position in his letter to Babur could also have been intended to reinstate himself as a pious *pir*, with an unstated assertion that his close affinity with the erstwhile rulers had been for a purely religious objective, unconcerned with anything profane and this-worldly. Whether he succeeded in his effort or not is a moot point. There is not much evidence in the existing contemporary sources—either from courtly circles or Sufi fraternities—to show his, and for that matter of any other Chishti shaikh's, regular and sustained connections with the early Mughals. The position of *pir* to Babur and Humayun was still a preserve of

<sup>9</sup> Compare Digby, 'Dreams and Reminiscences', p. 8on.

<sup>10</sup> *Maktubat-i Quddusiya*, pp. 224–25 and 335–39.

<sup>11</sup> Simon Digby, 'Abd al-Quddus Gangohi (1456–1537 A.D.): The personality and attitudes of a Medieval Indian Sufi' in *Medieval India—A Miscellany*, Vol. 3, pp. 1–66, in particular pp. 34–66; S.A.A. Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, Vol. I (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 2003 reprint), pp. 339–49.

<sup>12</sup> Digby, 'Abd al-Quddus Gangohi'; see also Iqtidar Alam Khan, 'Shaikh Abdul Quddus Gangohi's relations with political authorities: A reappraisal' in *Medieval India: A Miscellany*, Vol. 4, pp. 73–90.

the Naqshbandis of Mawarannahr (Transoxiana).<sup>13</sup> Humayun showed interest in some Indian saints, but they, as will see below, were not Chishtis. Much later in Akbar's reign the emperor's ideologue and historian, Abu al-Fazl, however, mentions that Humayun with some of his companions used at times to visit the shaikh, and spend some time in his divinely inspired and animated assembly to experience truth and gnosis.<sup>14</sup> This mention was then copied with obvious additions and hyperbolic effects in almost all the later Chishti *tazkiras* and also in some Mughal chronicles. Among the principal Sufi *tazkira* writers who did so was the noted seventeenth-century scholar, 'Abd al-Rahman Chishti, the author of the *Mir'at al-Asrar*.<sup>15</sup> 'Abd al-Rahman Chishti, like Gangohi, was also a Sabiri and came from Rudauli. Interestingly the authority that 'Abd al-Rahman cites for this report is Abu al-Fazl's *Tazkirat al-Auliya*, which obviously means the chapter entitled *Auliya-i Hind* (saints of India) in the *A'in-i Akbari*. How and why were these images of Mughal-Chishti connections formulated in the course of the consolidation of Mughal imperial power under Akbar? For an understanding of the Mughals' rather late appreciation of the need to build close contacts with India-specific Sufis, it will be useful if we first considered the trajectory of their relations with their erstwhile Mawarannahri *pirs*, in Transoxiana and also in India.

<sup>13</sup> Babur however did pay homage to the tombs of Qutb al-Din Bakhtiyar Kaki and Nizam al-Din Auliya in Delhi. Compare Zain Khan, *Tabaqat-i Baburi*, trans. Syed Hasan Askari (Delhi: Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Dilli, 1982), p. 92; Stephen F. Dale, *The Garden of the Eight Paradises: Babur and the Culture of Empire in Central Asia, Afghanistan and India, 1483–1530* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), pp. 199 and 331. Babur also visited the shrines of some other saints, like the one of Shaikh Sharf al-Din Yahya Maneri in Bihar (Dale, p. 444). Yahya was however a Firdausi Suhrawardi and not a Chishti saint, as Dale suggests. For his life see S.A.A. Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 2003 reprint), Vol. 1, pp. 228–40.

<sup>14</sup> Abu al-Fazl Allami, *A'in-i Akbari*, ed. Sayyid Ahmad Khan (Aligarh: Sir Syed Academy, Aligarh Muslim University, 2003 reprint), p. 214.

<sup>15</sup> Compare 'Abd al-Rahman Chishti, *Mir'at al-Asrar*, British Library, Ms. Or. 216, fol. 483; Muhammad Akram ibn Shaikh Muhammad 'Ali ibn Shaikh Ilah Bakhsh, *Sawati' al-Anwar*, fol. 381a. For an analysis of *Mir'at al-Asrar*, see Bruce B. Lawrence, 'An Indo-Persian Perspective on the Significance of Early Sufi Masters', in Leonard Lewisohn (ed.), *Classical Persian Sufism from its Origins to Rumi* (London: Khanqahi Nimatullahi Publications, 1993), pp. 19–32; Bruce B. Lawrence and Carl W. Ernst, *Sufi Martyrs of Love: Chishti Sufism in South Asia and Beyond* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 58–64. For 'Abd al-Rahman Chishti see also Shahid Amin, 'On retelling the Muslim conquest of India', in Partha Chatterjee and Anjan Ghosh (eds.), *History and the Present* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2002).

## Naqshbandi Shaikhs and Timurids in Mawarannahr

In the late-fourteenth century, the Mughals' great ancestor Amir Timur himself is reported to have maintained close relations with Amir Kulal, the *pir* and preceptor of Shaikh Baha al-Din Naqshband, after whom the Sufi *silsila* came to be known subsequently.<sup>16</sup> This was principally a routine spiritual relationship of a *murid* (seeker, disciple) with a *murshid* (guide, preceptor). In the fifteenth century, however, things changed with the emergence of Khwaja Ubaid-Allah Ahrar (d. 1490), the second great figure in the *silsila* after Baha al-Din, with whom the Naqshbandis expanded the frontiers of their influence far beyond Mawarannahr into Iran and Ottoman territory. Now, the relationship between a Naqshbandi master and his disciples, in particular the ones associated with power, also acquired a special social and political significance. Khwaja Ahrar was not only the spiritual preceptor (*pir*), but also a kind of paramount political patron of his disciples, amongst whom were a large number of the Timurid rulers and their nobles in Central Asia. He and several of his descendants and disciples claimed that they were not simply their spiritual masters, but also a source of strength and help in politics and power struggles.

Mulla Fakhr al-Din ibn Husain Wa'iz al-Kashifi, the author of *Rashhat 'Ain al-Hayat*, the renowned *tazkira* of the Khwaja and his associates, devotes a full chapter to describe the Khwaja's interventions in politics with an objective of setting the record straight, as he thought it ought to be. The chapter entitled 'an account of the miracles of Hazrat-i Ishan that pertain to his bestowal of conquering power to the kings, rulers and the others of his time' (*zikhri-tasarrafat-i ki hazrat-i Ishan betaslit-i quwwat-i qahira nisbat besalatin wa hukkam waghair-i ishan az ahl-i zaman pish burda and*) contains numerous anecdotes of his support or opposition to one or the other ruler of his time.<sup>17</sup> It is useful to quote here one anecdote that also shows in some detail the Khwaja's avowed mission and method.

<sup>16</sup> Hamid Algar, 'A brief history of the Naqshbandi order' and 'Political aspects of Naqshbandi history', in Marc Gaborieau, Alexandre Popovic and Thierry Zarcone (eds.), *Naqshbandis: Historical Developments and Present Situation of a Muslim Mystical Order* (Istanbul-Paris: Institut Français d'Etudes Anatoliennes d'Istanbul, 1990), pp. 3-44 and 123-52.

<sup>17</sup> Fakhr al-Din 'Ali ibn Husain Wa'iz al-Kashifi, *Rashhat 'Ain al-Hayat*, ed. 'Ali Asghar Mu'iniyan (Tehran: Bunyad-i Nikukari-i Nuriyani, 1977), pp. 516-69 for stories about Ahrar's relations with Sultans 'Abd-Allah, Abu Sa'id, Mahmud and Babur, for instance.

Hazrat-i Ishan had a vision (*dar waqi'a dida budand*) that it was with his help that the *shari'a* would acquire strength, which in turn, he thought, was to be achieved through the support of rulers. He then came to Samarqand to meet Mirza 'Abd-Allah bin Mirza Ibrahim bin Shahrukh, the Sultan of the city. I (the author) had also accompanied the Hazrat. On arriving in Samarqand, the Hazrat told one of the nobles who had come to meet him, that the purpose of his visit to the city was to meet with the Sultan and that it would be very good if he helped him in this matter. In a rude way the noble said: 'Our Mirza (ruler) is young and carefree. It is difficult to have an audience with him. And what do dervishes have to do with such tasks?' The Hazrat lost his temper and said: 'We have not come here on our own. We have been commanded [by God and the Prophet] to be in touch with the rulers (*beikhtilat-i salatin amr karda and*). [We] will bring another [ruler], if your Mirza is unconcerned'. When the noble left, the Hazrat wrote his [the Sultan's] name on the wall, then erased it with his saliva and said: 'Our mission cannot be carried out by this rule and his nobles'. The Hazrat left for Tashkent the same day. The noble then died after a week, and a month later Sultan Abu Sa'id Mirza marched from Eastern Turkestan against Mirza 'Abd-Allah and slaughtered him'.<sup>18</sup>

Ahrar thus saw himself as having been divinely ordained to protect the Muslims from the evil of oppressors (*Musulmanan ra az sharr-i zalama nigah darim*) and to help them achieve their purpose (*maqsud-i Muslimin bar-awurdan*).<sup>19</sup> This he thought he could achieve by 'trafficking with kings and conquering their souls' (*ba padshahan bayast ikhtilat kardan wa nufus-i ishan ra musakhkhar kardan*). There was thus a clear awareness of a political role that he believed he has been assigned to play. As a matter of fact, in the prevailing conditions, he believed that it was not correct for him to just sit on a street-corner, devoting his time to routine prayer and the spiritual training of disciples that a regular shaikh would normally do.<sup>20</sup> The chronicler Khwandamir thus reports that Sultan Abu Sa'id and his son, Sultan Ahamd sought his advice in important state matters.<sup>21</sup> Whether this meant the elevation of political activity to the level of a kind of principle of the Naqshbandi *silsila* is not so important as the fact that all this was with a view to ensuring the implementation of the cause of the *shari'a*. This was

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 518–19.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 295.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 329. See also Jo-Ann Gross, 'Multiple roles and perceptions of a Sufi Shaikh: Symbolic statements of political and religious authority', in Gaborieau, Popovic and Zarcone (eds.), *Naqshbandis*, pp. 109–21.

<sup>21</sup> Khwandamir, *Habib al-Siyar* (Tehran: Khayyam, 1352 Shamsi/1973), vol. 4, pp. 87 and 109.

something *new* and *different* from a mere loyalty to the *shari'a* which earlier Shaikh Baha al-Din had insisted upon.<sup>22</sup>

Ahrar's power and triumph is to be explained perhaps more in terms of his enormous wealth and organizing skill than his spiritual and sufi qualities, howsoever unusual and unprecedented such wealth and skill might have been. He was probably the biggest single landowner of Central Asia of his time. He possessed thousands of acres of the best irrigated lands in Tashkent, Samarqand, Bukhara, Kashkadaria and other places. Besides, he also owned 64 villages surrounded with irrigating canals, 30 out-of-town orchards, 11 town estates and scores of commercial establishments and artisanal workshops, numerous arcades of shops and commercial stalls, town baths and water mills.<sup>23</sup> These properties were critical for the system of protection and patronage that Ahrar developed, and which included an economic network made up of these holdings and also his trading activities, both regional and international. There were a large number of people and officials involved in this network, working with Ahrar himself at the central *khanqah*, and also spread out in various places all over Turkestan, Mawarannahr and Khurasan, to maintain and administer these properties. Many of them were not even his formal spiritual disciples. With this organized wealth, Ahrar was able to help both commoners and rulers in time of their financial difficulties.<sup>24</sup> It was in this way that he rearranged the forces of the Naqshbandi *silsila* to an unprecedented degree, building and consolidating his overriding position and uncontested power in the region.

The nature of Ahrar's unusual relations with the rulers of the region is illustrated from the behaviour of Sultan Ahmad Mirza who along with some of his nobles was initiated by him into the Naqshbandi order.

<sup>22</sup> I intend to maintain a distance here from the scholars who think that all through their history the Naqshbadi Sufis have been involved in one or the other sort of political activity. I have therefore emphasized the words 'new' and 'different'. See also Algar, 'Aspects of Naqshbandi history', pp. 123–52, and Jo-Ann Gross, 'Multiple roles of a Sufi Shaikh: Symbolic statements of political and religious authority', in Gaborieau, Popovic and Zarcone (eds.), *Naqshbandis*, pp. 109–21.

<sup>23</sup> Compare O.D. Chekhovich, *Samarqand Documents* (Moscow, 1974), pp. 67, 72, 125, 244 and 247; al-Kashifi, *Rashhat*, pp. 227, 228, 246 and 328. See also Jo-Ann Gross, 'Economic status of a Timurid Sufi Shaikh: A matter of conflict or perception' in *Iranian Studies*, vol. 21 (1988), pp. 84–104. For Ahrar's estates in Kabul see also, Stephen F. Dale and Alam Payind, 'The Ahrari Waqf in Kabul in the Year 1546 and the Mughul Naqshbandiyyah' in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 119, No. 2 (1999), pp. 218–33.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Jürgen Paul, 'Forming a faction: The Himayat System of Khwaja Ahrar' in *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 23 (1991), pp. 533–48.

The Sultan was not simply extraordinarily respectful and overawed in the presence of Khwaja Ahrar. He never placed one knee over the other before the Khwaja, and on occasion would start trembling and sweating out of fear in his presence (*az haibat wa dahshat-i majlis-i Hazrat-i Ishan gosht-i shana-i wai mi larzid wa qatrat-i arq az jabin-i wai mi chakid*).<sup>25</sup> In return, he received the Khwaja's full support and, according to Babur's own testimony, even if he was a man of ordinary intelligence he was successful only because 'his, highness, the Khwaja, was there accompanying him step by step'.<sup>26</sup>

Babur's own father 'Umar Shaikh Mirza was also a disciple of the Khwaja, who often visited the Mirza and treated him as his son'.<sup>27</sup> According to Abu al-Fazl, 'the king (Umar Shaikh) was always of a dervish mind and inclined to the society of religious persons and asked for wisdom at the doors of the hearts of the God knowing, especially the holy Nasir al-Din Khwaja Ubaid-Allah, known by the name Khwaja Ahrar'.<sup>28</sup> The Khwaja is also reported to have given substantial amounts of money to the Mirza, once 250,000 *dinars* and on another occasion 70,000 *dinars*, to relieve the tax burden of the Muslims of Tashkent.<sup>29</sup> A measure of the Khwaja's intimacy with the Mirza was the fact that at Babur's birth, he, his father-in-law, Yunus Khan, the ruler of Moghulistan, and Maulana Munir Marghinani, one of the major theologians of the time, who had composed the chronogram of the birth of the prince, 'begged his Holiness' (writes Mirza Haidar Dughlat), 'to choose a name for the child and he blessed him with the name of Zahir al-Din Muhammad. [But]t that time the Chaghatai were very rude and uncultured . . . , and not refined . . . as they are now; thus they found Zahir al-Din Muhammad difficult to pronounce, and for this reason gave him the name of Babur'.<sup>30</sup> In the

<sup>25</sup> Zahir al-Din Muhammad Babur, *Baburnama*, English translation by A.S. Beveridge (Delhi: Oriental Reprints, 1970), pp. 33. Also see Wheeler M. Thackston's translation, (New York: Modern Library, 2002 ), p. 53; al-Kashifi, *Rashahat*, p. 531.

<sup>26</sup> *Baburnama*, Beveridge trans., pp. 33 and 34; Thackston's trans., pp. 53–54.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, Beveridge trans., p. 15; Thackston trans., p. 41.

<sup>28</sup> Abu al-Fazl Allami, *Akbarnama*, Vol. I, ed. Agha Ahmad 'Ali and 'Abdur Rahim (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1877), p.84, English trans. H. Beveridge, (Delhi: Low Price Publications, 2002 reprint), p. 219. See also *Baburnama*, Beveridge trans., p. 15, Thackston trans., p. 9.

<sup>29</sup> S.A.A. Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India* (Delhi: Munshram Manoharlal, 2002 reprint), vol. II, p. 177. Rizvi cites *Samarqand Documents* and a Tashkent Ms. of a *tazkira* of Ahrar, *Maqamat-i Khwaja Ahrar*.

<sup>30</sup> *A History of the Moghuls of Central Asia Being the The Tarihk-i Rashidi of Mirza Haidar Dughlat*, E. Denison Ross, English trans. (London: Curzon Press, New York: Barnes and Noble, 1972 reprint), p. 173.

words of Abu al-Fazl the 'weighty appellation with its majesty and sublimity, was not readily pronounceable or current on the tongues of the Turks, the name Babur was [thus] also given to him'.<sup>31</sup> In Farghana, the Khwaja also had a close association with the important families of the nobles and high officials. One such was the family of 'Abd-Allah who made use of the joint name of Khwaja-Maulana-Qazi because he combined in his house the positions of *muqtada* (religious guide), *shaikh al-Islam* and *qazi*.<sup>32</sup>

### The Mawarannahri Shaikhs and the Early Mughals

Although associated with the moment of his birth, Khwaja Ahrar had died by the time Babur rose to power. But the prince nevertheless attributes several of his achievements to the Khwaja's blessings. Shortly before he took Samarqand in 1501, he had seen the Khwaja in a dream. He writes:

His Highness Khwaja Ubaid-Allah seemed to come; I seemed to go out to give him honourable meeting; he came in and seated himself; people seemed to lay a table-cloth before him, apparently without sufficient care and, on account of this, something seemed to come to his Highness Khwaja's mind. Mullah Baba (? Pashagari) made me a sign; I signed back, 'Not through me the table-layer is in fault'. The Khwaja understood and accepted the excuse. When he rose I escorted him out. In the hall of that house he took hold of my right or left arm and lifted me up till one of my feet was off the ground, saying in Turki, 'Shaikh Maslahat has given (Samarkand)'. I really took Samarkand a few days later.<sup>33</sup>

As a matter of fact, in that town the followers of the Khwaja held a considerable position at the turn of the century. They did not pay any levies to the government under the Khawja's principle of *himayat* and they sometimes even dictated who should have the supreme power in the town. For only a brief while, in 1494, they had some difficulty when Sultan Mahmud Mirza was for a few months in possession of the town, made new regulations, and treated them with harshness and oppression.<sup>34</sup> Khwaja Ahrar's son Khwaja 'Abd-Allah (better known as Khwajagi Khwaja) and Khwaja Muhammad Yahya were

<sup>31</sup> *Akbarnama*, Vol. I, p. 87, English trans., p. 225.

<sup>32</sup> *Baburnama*, Beveridge trans., pp. 89–90, Thackstone trans., p. 65.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, Beveridge trans., p. 132; Thackston trans., p. 98–99.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, Beveridge trans., p. 41, Thackstone trans., p. 28.

their leaders. Earlier, in 1499, when Babur intended to capture the town, he was told by the *begs* to approach Khwaja Yahya with whose consent, they thought 'the town may be had easily without fighting and disturbance'. In Babur's own understanding too, the matter was to be resolved when Khwaja Yahya would decide to 'admit us to the town'.<sup>35</sup> The issue thus was not simply one of spiritual power; Khwaja Yahya was clearly involved in the politics of the town. Earlier, in 901 AH, when the Tarkhanis of the town had revolted against Baisunghar Mirza and raised his half-brother Sultan 'Ali Mirza to supreme power, Khwaja Yahya blessed the latter and became his *pir*. But interestingly enough, the rebels could not lay hands on Baisunghar as he had taken refuge in the house of Khwaja 'Abd-Allah.<sup>36</sup> Babur noted and actually appreciated this political involvement. He writes:

Through these occurrences, the sons of His Highness Khwaja Ubaid-Allah became settled partisans, the elder (Muhammad Ubaid-Allah, Khwajagi Khwaja) becoming the spiritual guide of the elder prince, the younger (Yahya) of the younger.<sup>37</sup>

Later, when the Uzbek ruler Shaibani Khan conquered Samarqand, he had apprehensions about Khwaja Yahya and therefore dismissed him, with his two sons, Khwaja Muhammad Zakariya and Khwaja Baqi, towards Khurasan. Some Uzbeks followed them and near Khwaja Kardzan killed both the Khwaja and his two young sons. Babur strongly resented this incident.<sup>38</sup> As a ruler of Mawarannahr, however, Shaibani Khan could not afford to be indifferent to the great Naqshbandi lineages as such. While he harshly treated the descendants of Khwaja Ahrar, he offered prayers at the shrines of Khwaja 'Abd al-Khaliq Ghijduwani (d. 1220) and Shaikh Baha al-Din Naqshband (d. 1389), along with a large number of his nobles, the *ulama* and Sufis, who included several noted Naqshbandis of the time.<sup>39</sup> Later, Shaibani Khan's nephew Ubaid-Allah Khan, restored the major part of the Ahrar family lands. Still later, the descendants of Khwaja Yahya

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, Beveridge trans., p. 124, Thackston trans., p. 93.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, Beveridge trans., pp. 61–3, Thackston trans., p. 45.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, Beveridge trans., pp. 61–3, Thackston trans., p. 45.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, Beveridge trans., p. 128, Thackston trans., p. 96.

<sup>39</sup> Fazl-Allah ibn Ruzbihani Isfahani, *Mihman-nama-i Bukhara*, ed. Manuchehr Satudeh (Tehran: Bungah-i Tarjuma wa Nashr-i Kitab, 1341 Shamsi/1962), pp. 43 and 61. See also Annemarie Scimmel, 'Some notes on the cultural activity of the first Uzbek rulers' in *Journal of Pakistan Historical Society*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (1960), pp. 149–66. Ghijduwani was separated by five links in the *silsila* before its crystallization under the auspices of Baha al-Din Naqshband.

became the *shaikh al-Islam* of the city of Samarqand, combining with it the trusteeship of rich endowments settled on the tomb of Khwaja Ahrar.<sup>40</sup>

It is well known that between 1500 and his conquest of India, Babur came into contact with Shah Isma'il Safavi and with his help avenged himself upon the Uzbeks for the devastation they had wreaked on the Timurids and their associates in Central Asia. Because of his close relations with the Safavid Shah, who was not an orthodox Shi'a but a zealous propagator of heterodox Shi'ism, Babur is also alleged to have temporarily developed Shi'a leanings. It is also reported that a Naqshbandi shaikh of the time, Ahmad ibn Jalal al-Din Khwajagi admonished him for his seeking help from the Shah of Iran and asked him instead to accept Shaibani Khan as a *khalifa*.<sup>41</sup> Be that as it may, Babur nevertheless remained a lifelong devotee of Khwaja Ahrar. Of interest here is an anecdote pertaining to Babur's victory over Ibrahim Lodi in the battle of Panipat in 1526. The anecdote is reported by a seventeenth-century historian, Muhammad Sadiq. Sadiq writes that as Babur's army was too small in opposition to a huge and near-countless Afghan brigade, he felt overwhelmed and feared that he might lose the battle to the enemy. He then contemplated the image of Khwaja Ahrar as he had heard it described. All at once there appeared a horseman dressed in white, fighting against the Afghans, who were thereupon completely routed. Later, after the fight, he narrated the incident to one of his nobles. The noble told Babur that according to his description, the horseman in white was Maulana Ahmad Khwajagi. The same day, Babur sent one of his close courtiers to Khwajagi with several gifts together with a portrait drawn on a piece of paper. Babur,

<sup>40</sup> Algar, 'A brief history of the Naqshbandi order', in Gaborieau, Popovic and Zarcone (eds.), *Naqshbandis*, pp. 15–6.

<sup>41</sup> See Fazl-Allah ibn Ruzbihani Isfahani, *Suluk al-Muluk*, British Library, London Ms. Or. 253, Preface, fol. 3a. Isfahani writes that with Babur's help, heresy, which is to say Shi'ism, spread in Mawarannahr and that he, like the Iranian Shi'i leaders played a detestable role in bringing the mosques and other religious centres of the region beyond the river Jihun under the control of the heretic Shi'as. The region was thus afire with their mischief (*fitna*). All this happened because he invited the red-capped Safavid *qizilbash* to come to his help in his fight against the Uzbeks to recover Samarqand and Bukhara. But for Ubaid-Allah Khan's gallant struggle (*jihad*), the rites and symbols of the true faith would have been completely routed in the region. See also the printed edition of this text by Muhammad 'Ali Muvahhid (Tehran: Intisharat-i Khwarzimi, 1362 Shamsi/1983), p. 50. For an English translation of this work, see Muhammad Aslam, *Muslim Conduct of State* (Islamabad: University of Islamabad Press, 1974), pp. 31–3.

according to Sadiq, included the following verses too in the letter he wrote to the saint:

*Dar hawa-i nafs gumrah umr zayi' karda-im  
pish-i ahl-i faqr az atwar-i khud sharminda-im  
Yak nazar bar mukhlisan-i khasta dil farma ki ma  
Khwajagi ra manda aknun Khwajagi ra banda-im.*

I have wasted my life in pursuit of what my misguided soul desired  
I am ashamed of my conduct in front of the ascetics  
Please spare a glance for your infirm devotees  
I am now a slave of Khwajagi, who[se directives] I had neglected.<sup>42</sup>

The saint seems to be the same Ahmad Khwajagi who had earlier resented Babur's seeking help from the Safavid Shah. The letter sounds like a statement of repentance for his earlier comportment and a reaffirmation of his devotion to Khwajagi Ahmad, in particular, and to the Naqshbandi saints in general.

Although Babur himself does not mention this incident, his continuing faith in and loyalty to the Naqshbandi order is pretty clear. On November 6, 1528, when he fell ill in India, he decided to render into poetry a treatise of Khwaja Ahrar entitled *Risala-i Walidiya* with a belief that this was how he would be able to cure himself of the disease. He writes:

I laid it to heart that if I, going to the soul of His Reverence for protection were freed from this disease, it would be a sign that my poem was accepted (...). To this end I began to versify the tract (...). Thirteen couplets were made in the same night. I tasked myself not to make fewer than ten a day; in the end one day had been omitted. While last year every time such illness had happened, it had persisted at least a month or forty days, this year by God's grace and His Reverence's favor, I was free, except for a little depression, on Thursday the 29th of the month (November 12). The end of versifying the contents of the tract was reached on Saturday the 8th of the first Rabi (November 20th). One day 52 couplets had been made.<sup>43</sup>

From their usual residence in Samarqand, Babur also invited to Hindustan Khwaja Ahrar's grandsons Khwaja Khawand Mahmud (also known as Khwaja Nura) and Khwaja 'Abd al-Shahid (the second son of Khwajagi Khwaja), and his great-grandson Khwaja Kalan (a grandson of Khwaja Yahya). The last two were guests of honour at a

<sup>42</sup> Muhammad Sadiq, *Tabaqat-i Shahjahani*, British Library, India Office Library Ms., Ethé 705, fols. 192b-193a. Khwajagi Ahmad, a disciple of Maulana Muhammad Qazi, who was a disciple of Khwaja Ahrar, died in 949 A.H. He is buried in Dehbid.

<sup>43</sup> *Baburnama*, trans. Beveridge, pp. 619-20, Thackston trans., p. 420; Dale, *The Garden of the Eight Paradises*, pp. 176-77.

feast that Babur gave in Agra on December 18, 1528. On this occasion, they sat at his right and received rich presents.<sup>44</sup> However, they did not choose to stay in India. On the other hand, Khwaja Khawand Mahmud set out for India only in the spring of 1530, but before his arrival, Mirza Haidar Dughlat writes, Babur had died. He was nevertheless received in Agra with great honour by the new ruler, Humayun.<sup>45</sup> Soon however, 'for some [unspecified] reasons', he left for Kabul and died there.<sup>46</sup> In Dughlat's account, there is a vague clue suggesting the reason why he did not stay at Humayun's court. Khwaja Khawand had apparently come with the intention of occupying the exclusive position of the royal spiritual master. But while Humayun welcomed and showed respect to him, he was also simultaneously devoted to a Shattari Sufi saint, Shaikh Phul. Dughlat writes:

At that period there had arisen in Hindustan a man named Shaikh Phul. Humayun was anxious to become his disciple, for he had a great passion for the occult sciences—for magic and conjuration. Shaikh Phul having assumed the garb of a Shaikh, came to the Emperor and taught him that incantation and sorcery were the surest means to the true attainment of an object. Since doctrines such as these suited his disposition, he became at once the Shaikh's disciple. Besides this person there was Maulana Muhammad Parghari who, though a Mulla, was a very [irreligious] and unprincipled man, and who always worked hard to gain his ends, even when they were of an evil nature. The Shaikh asked the aid of Mulla Muhammad and, in common, by means of flattery, they wrought upon the Emperor for their own purposes, and gained his favour.

Not long after, I went to visit the Emperor (...), but I could never gather that he had learned anything from his *pir*, Shaikh Phul, except magic and incantation. But God knows the best. The influence of Shaikh Phul thus confirmed, Maulana Muhammad, or rather the Emperor and all his following, neglected and slighted Khwaja Nura, who had a hereditary claim to their veneration. This naturally caused the Khwaja great inward vexation.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>44</sup> *Baburnama*, trans. Beveridge, pp. 632 and 641–42, Thackston trans., pp. 426 and 432; Dale, *The Garden of the Eight Paradises*, pp. 427–28. Dale also mentions one unidentified Khwaja Chishti.

<sup>45</sup> *A History of the Moghuls of Central Asia*, p. 398; *Akbarnama*, Vol. II, p. 194, English trans., p. 301.

<sup>46</sup> *A History of the Moghuls of Central Asia*, p. 398; Samsam al-Daula Shah Nawaz Khan, *Ma'asir al-Umara*, Vol. II (Calcutta: Bibliotheca Indica, 1891), p. 575.

<sup>47</sup> *A History of the Moghuls of Central Asia*, pp. 398–99. See also Persian text edited by Wheeler M. Thackston, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 345–47.

The sorcery and magic that Dughlat mentions were the Sufi prayer and litanics known as *da'wat-o-asma-i hasana*, in vogue among the Shattaris in India. The practice involved the observation and study of stars and other heavenly bodies. Humayun's fascination with the Shattari saints, we may guess, could have been because of his own interest in astronomical sciences. Later in the century, the chronicler 'Abd al-Qadir Bada'uni writes that he had great devotion to and trust in Shaikh Phul (or Bahlul) and his younger brother, Shaikh Ghaus of Gwalior and had learnt from them the method of *asma'*. In 1540, when during his campaigns in eastern India against Sher Khan, he heard the disturbing news of his brother Mirza Hindal's plan of rebellion, he sent Shaikh Bahlul to try to talk to him on his behalf to seek reconciliation. Hindal and the other nobles in his retinue, however, suspected the Shaikh to be acting in collusion with the Afghans. He was thus killed by one of Hindal's associates.<sup>48</sup>

As for Khwaja Khawand, he seems to have left for Lahore at the invitation of another of Humayun's brothers, Mirza Kamran. By this time, Mirza Dughlat also arrived in Lahore to have the honour of 'kissing his feet'. While they were in Lahore, the Safavid ruler Shah Tahmasp invaded Qandahar and captured it. This obviously caused Kamran 'immense grief' and when Dughlat at his request told the Khwaja about his misfortune, the latter is reported to have said to him: 'I have seen His Holiness [Khwaja Ahrar] in a vision. He asked me, 'Why are you sad?' I replied: 'On account of Kamran Mirza, for the Turkomans have taken Kandahar. What will come of it?' Then His Holiness advanced towards me and taking me by the hand said: 'Do not grieve; he will soon recover it'. And thus, indeed, it came to pass, for Kamran Mirza marched against Kandahar, and the troops of Tahmasp Shah gave up the city to him in peace'.

Dughlat's account shows not simply his anguish over Humayun's treatment of the Khwaja. It reiterates the Timurids' continuing faith in and their devotion to the family of Khwaja Ahrar. Humayun,

<sup>48</sup> 'Abd al-Qadir Bada'uni, *Muntakhab al-Tawarikh*, ed. by Kabiruddin Ahmad, Ahmad 'Ali and W.N. Lees (Calcutta: Bibliotheca Indica, 1869), Vol. III, pp. 4–5; *Ma'asir al-Umara*, Vol. II, pp. 575–76. Humayun remained close to Shaikh Muhammad Ghaus until he lost the empire to the Afghans and fled to Iran. The Shaikh then left for Gujarat. When Humayun regained power he returned to Delhi. The emperor, however, died soon afterwards and the saint was disappointed at his reception by Bairam Khan, the regent of the young emperor, Akbar. He then retired to Gwalior where he died in 970 AH. See also K.A. Nizami, 'Shattari saints and their attitude towards the state' in *Medieval India Quarterly*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1950), pp. 56–70.

therefore, was also perturbed over the Khwaja's decision to depart from his court, and begged him to stay, but the latter would not listen to his entreaties. He then sent Maulana Muhammad Parghari to Lahore to persuade the Khwaja to return, and on his continued refusal, the Maulana begged his sins to be forgiven and beseeched him to write a reply to the letter from Humayun. The Khwaja in response reportedly wrote only the following verse:

*Humai gu mafigan saya-i sharaf hargiz  
daran dayar ki tuti kam az zaghan bashad*

Say, O Huma [bird], never cast thy noble shadow  
In a land where the parrot is less accounted than the kite.

Dughlat further writes that in this response, there was a curious pun, for Humayun Padishah eventually did not come to throw his shadow in the country (India) where the parrot was rarer than the kite. Dughlat also notes that in those days, he often heard the Khwaja say: 'I have seen in a vision, a great sea which overwhelmed all who remained behind us in Agra and Hindustan; while we only escaped after a hundred risks'; and Humayun's defeat at the hands of Sher Shah eventually came about 3 years later, just as the Khwaja had predicted.<sup>49</sup>

The unfortunate Humayun thus missed the blessings of both the Naqshbandi Khwaja of his ancestral homeland, Mawarannahr, and the great Chishti Shaikh of Hindustan. Later his relations with Khwaja Khawand appear to have been restored somewhat. In 1546, during an illness of the Emperor in Kabul, the Khwaja and his son Khwaja Mu'in were the only ones besides his personal attendant allowed to visit him.<sup>50</sup> Humayun also had some contacts in Kabul with Maulana Zain al-Din, an eminent Naqshbandi of his time, and with Khwaja 'Abd al-Bari, a great-great-grandson of Khwaja Ahrar.

It is also worth noting here that the Mughals were connected with some of the great Naqshbandi lineages matrimonially. A daughter of Babur was married to Nur al-Din Muhammad, a descendant of Khwaja 'Ala al-Din 'Attar, who was the first *khalifa* (or disciple) of Khwaja Baha al-Din Naqshband. Their daughter, Salima Begam, as we will see below, was later married to the powerful Mughal noble Bairam

<sup>49</sup> *A History of the Moghuls of Central Asia*, pp. 399–400; *Ma'asir al-Umara*, II, 575. Ross's translation of the phrase '*wa sargardan raft*' here is confusing. He adds the name of Maulana Muhammad in square brackets and translates the phrase as '[Maulana Muhammad] returned stupefied'.

<sup>50</sup> *Akbarnama*, Vol. I, p. 253, English trans., pp. 493–94.

Khan. Humayun's younger son, Mirza Muhammad Hakim, the ruler of Kabul, gave his sister, Fakhr al-Nisa in marriage to Khwaja Hasan Naqshbandi, a descendant of Baha al-Din Naqshband, after the death of her first husband, Abu al-Ma'ali. Khwaja Hasan thus became very powerful in Kabul for a time in the later sixteenth century.<sup>51</sup>

In the early phase of Mughal settlement in Hindustan, the presence of certain Naqshbandi saints as *pirs* (but not necessarily as the royal *pir*) and as important members of the Mughal elite, is unmistakable. The second phase of Timurid contact with the subcontinent begins with Humayun's return from his exile in Iran. Humayun, as we know, died soon after his return and resumption of power in Delhi. The process of recovery of the lost territory, its consolidation and further expansion only took place in Akbar's time. We may now turn to how the Naqshbandi Khwajas figured at this critical juncture of the shaping of Mughal power.

### Akbar Encounters the Naqshbandis

At the beginning of Akbar's reign (1556–1605) Khwaja 'Abd al-Shahid, who had earlier visited Babur's court, arrived anew from Samarqand. Akbar received him 'with respect and kindness' and granted him the *pargana* of Chamari in Punjab. There the Khwaja lived for about two decades, 'with piety and severe austerities, striving much in the path of holiness as a compendium of all such perfection as man can attain to'. He was widely respected and people from all walks of life visited him acquiring grace from his 'precious utterances', 'being directed thereby in the path of righteousness and godly living'. The Khwaja, according to the chronicler Bada'uni, was a symbol based on the earlier model of Khwaja Ahrar. In 1561, when the Mughal commander Husain Quli Khan chasing the rebel Mirzas (who had

<sup>51</sup> *Muntakhab al-Tawarikh*, Vol. II, p. 72. Commenting on Khwaja Hasan's absolute power some of the wits of the period used to say:

If our Master be Master Hasan

We shall have neither sack nor rope left.

For his and other Naqshbandis position at Mirza Hakim's court in Kabul, see Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'A note on the Kabul kingdom under Muhammad Hakim Mirza (1554–85)' in *La Transmission du savoir dans le monde musulman périphérique, Lettre d'information*, No. 14 (1994), pp. 89–101; Munis D. Faruqi, 'The forgotten Prince: Mirza Hakim and the formation of the Mughal Empire in India' in *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Vol. 48, No. 4 (2005), pp. 487–523.

risen up against Akbar) arrived at Chamari, he received from the Khwaja an assurance of his own victory, and the holy man's dress as a present. Bada'uni concludes: 'The result of this prayer was that having arrived by forced marches in Tulambah he (Husain Quli) gained a glorious victory'.<sup>52</sup> In 1574, however, the Khwaja left India, also according to Bada'uni, following a premonition of his fast approaching death. 'The time of my departure is drawn nigh', the Khwaja is reported to have said, 'and I have been commanded to convey this handful of bones, of which I am composed, to the burying place of my ancestors in Samarqand'. He died shortly after his arrival in Samarqand.<sup>53</sup> However, the real reason and occasion for the Khwaja's departure seems to have been the rapid decline of the Naqshbandis from the favour of the Emperor. To gain a clearer sense of this decline, we may examine the career of another noted Naqshbandi, Sharaf al-Din Husain, who also visited Akbar's court early in his reign.

Sharaf al-Din Husain was the son of Khwaja Mu'in and a grandson of Khwaja Khawand Mahmud. He had lived with his father in Kashghar, where the latter had made a fortune as a merchant dealing in precious stones.<sup>54</sup> He was sent by the ruler of Kashghar to offer condolences on the death of Humayun in 1556 and to congratulate Akbar on his accession.<sup>55</sup> Sharaf al-Din came with this mission accompanied by Khwaja 'Abd al-Bari, who had earlier been sent by Humayun to Kashghar at the time of his expedition to reconquer India. Khwaja 'Abd al-Bari also belonged to 'the noble line of the Naqshbandi Khwajas', and we learn that he was 'son of Khwaja 'Abd al-Khafi, son of Khwaja 'Abd al-Hadi, son of Khwajagan Khwaja, son of Khwaja Ahrar—may his grave be holy'.<sup>56</sup>

Now, Sharaf al-Din soon rose in eminence in the Mughal court through the influence of Maham Ananga and Adham Khan, important figures of the early years of Akbar's reign. He received the high rank of *amir*, and was given *jagirs* in Ajmer and Nagor. During the 5th year of his reign, the Emperor gave him his half-sister Bakhshi Banu Begam in marriage. In the 7th year he was deputed to capture the fort

<sup>52</sup> *Muntakhab al-Tawarikh*, Vol. III, p. 40; *Ma'asir al-Umara*, Vol. II, p. 379; *Akbarnama*, Vol. II, p. 127, English trans. p. 195.

<sup>53</sup> *Muntakhab*, p. 40.

<sup>54</sup> *Akbarnama*, English trans., Vol. II, p. 194–5, English trans., pp. 301–2; *Ma'asir al-Umara*, Vol. III, p. 234. Khwaja Mu'in had the monopoly of jade trade with China.

<sup>55</sup> *Akbarnama*, Vol. II, p. 195, English trans., pp. 302–3; *Ma'asir al-Umara*, Vol. III, p. 234.

<sup>56</sup> *Akbarnama*, Vol. II, p. 21, English trans., p. 37.

of Mertha. Abu al-Fazl notes that he was assigned a high *mansab* of 5000.<sup>57</sup> In the 8th year, his father Khwaja Mu'in 'hearing of his son's exaltation and grandeur', also arrived from Kashghar. The Emperor received him with respect, gave him 'honourable quarters and treated him with favours such as kings show to dervishes'.<sup>58</sup> The Naqshbandis at this stage were hence held 'in great esteem', to the extent that Mulla Mubarak, whom Bada'uni portrays as a man opportunistically inclined doing what was most rewarding at a given moment, 'adapted himself to their rule'.<sup>59</sup> It has been noted that Bairam Khan's wife, Salima Sultan Begam also came from a Naqshbandi family. She was a 'daughter of Nur al-Din Muhammad, Nur al-Din was son of 'Ala al-Din Muhammad, who was son of Khwaja Hasan, commonly known as Khwajazada Chaghaniyan. This Khwajazada was grandson of Khwaja Hasan 'Attar, who again was a direct descendant of Khwaja 'Ala al-Din, the first *khalifa* of Khwaja Baha al-Din Naqshband. We should also keep in mind that Khwajazada Chaghaniyan was son-in-law of Sultan Mahmud, son of Sultan Abu Sa'id Mirza'.<sup>60</sup>

Soon after, however, the Naqshbandis' position seems to have declined, even though some of them held a couple of offices until about the end of the 1570s. One 'Abd al-'Azim, better known as Sultan Khwaja, the son of a disciple of Khwaja 'Abd al-Shahid, was selected to be the *amir-i hajj* in 1576. He returned from Mecca in 1578 and then held the office of the *sadr* until his death in 1584.<sup>61</sup> In 1578, another Naqshbandi, Khwaja Muhammad Yahya, a direct descendant of Khwaja Ahrar was appointed *amir-i hajj*.<sup>62</sup> After the 1570s, however, we have only Sultan Khwaja with a position of some eminence at Akbar's court, as his daughter was even married to Prince Daniyal in 1588.<sup>63</sup> But Sultan Khwaja's seems to be an altogether peculiar

<sup>57</sup> *Akbarnama*, Vol. II, p. 128, English trans., p. 197; *Ma'asir al-Umara*, Vol. III, pp. 234–35.

<sup>58</sup> *Akbarnama*, Vol. II, p. 195, English trans., p. 303; *Ma'asir al-Umara*, Vol. III, pp. 235–36.

<sup>59</sup> Bada'uni writes that he followed 'many and various rules of life. For some time during the reigns of the Afghan emperors he used to keep company with Shaikh 'Ala'i, and in the beginning of the Emperor's [Akbar's] reign, when the Naqshbandi order was held in a great esteem, he adapted himself to their rule, and for some time he was attached to the Hamadani Shaikhs, and at last when the Iraqis were in great favour at the Court he spoke as one of their religion'; *Muntakhab al-Tawarikh*, English trans. Vol. III, p. 74.

<sup>60</sup> *Akbarnama*, Vol. II, p. 64, English trans., p. 97; *Ma'asir al-Umara*, Vol. I, p. 375.

<sup>61</sup> *Ma'asir al-Umara*, Vol. II, p. 380.

<sup>62</sup> *Muntakhab al-Tawarikh*, Vol. II, p. 267.

<sup>63</sup> *Ma'asir al-Umara*, Vol. II, p. 381.

case. His position, according to a report, owed to his 'conversion' in support of Akbar's religious innovations of the time, which meant unquestioned obeisance to the Emperor and a nearly total deviation from the Naqshbandi Ahrari tradition.<sup>64</sup>

A major factor behind the turn in the Emperor's attitude could have been the revolt of Sharaf al-Din Husain himself in 1560s. Akbar decided to tackle this with uncompromising firmness. He refused to listen even to Khwaja 'Abd al-Shahid's recommendation on the matter,<sup>65</sup> which must have disappointed the Khwaja and forced him to leave for Samarqand. This appears to be a major reason for what happened—and not simply a wish to die in Samarqand as Bada'uni would have us believe of his departure in 1574. In fact, Bada'uni gives this hagiographical explanation while writing the biographical notices of the saint in the third volume of his history. In the context of his description of the incident in the second volume, however, he himself provides a clue to the real reason for the saint's departure. He writes that the saint 'felt much grief at the refusal [to accept his advice] and left much saddened, even though the Emperor did not neglect any marks of due honour and respect, and publicly even read the *fatiha*'.<sup>66</sup>

### The Sufi Shaikhs and the Formation of Akbari Dispensation

The seemingly disproportionate grief of the Khwaja reported by Bada'uni, might have been a consequence of the new developments at Akbar's court, where, he realized, there would be little place left for the Mawarannahri Naqshbandis to live in their erstwhile style. In several modern writings on Mughal India, we have excellent accounts

<sup>64</sup> *Muntakhab al-Tawarikh*, Vol. II, p. 340–41. According to Bada'uni, Sultan Khwaja requested the Emperor at the time of his death to intern him in a grave with a special lamp and to fix a grill facing the sun so that the light thereof might obliterate his sins. He willed so to please the Emperor and because he was a follower of the new faith *Din-i Ilahi* in which light and the Sun had a special sacred place. The author of the *Ma'asir al-Umara* (Vol. II, pp. 381–2) dismisses this story as an instance of Bada'uni's bigotry.

<sup>65</sup> *Muntakhab al-Tawarikh*, Vol. II, p. 171. *Akbarnama*, Vol. II, p. 195, English trans., p. 303 for Sharaf al-Din's revolt.

<sup>66</sup> *Muntakhab al-Tawarikh*, Vol. II, p. 171. Bada'uni also reports that the Khwaja commanded immense respect among the rulers of Kabul and Central Asia. On his way to Samarqand when he arrived at Kabul 'it happened that Mirza Shah Rukh had just taken the people of Kabul captive, and was returning with them to Badakhshan. By means of the intercession of the Khwaja nearly 10,000 persons obtained deliverance. . .'. Compare *Muntakhab al-Tawarikh*, Vol. III, p. 40.

of the details of these developments.<sup>67</sup> We need not repeat them all here, even if it may not be pointless to briefly mention some of them. The most momentous of these was the emperor's marriage with a Rajput princess early in his reign, and together with it a number of administrative measures such as the abolition of pilgrimage taxes and the hated *jizya*, and giving up of the practice of forcibly converting prisoners-of-war to Islam. By the mid-1560s there had also evolved a new pattern of emperor–noble relationship, which suited the needs of a new Mughal state, to be defended now by a nobility of diverse ethnic and religious groups, amongst whom the Hindus and the Shi'as came to occupy a significant position. The Mughals were originally Hanafi Sunnis and Akbar too, until the 1570s at least remained faithful to this tradition. On the other hand, the new non-Muslim and non-Sunni recruits into Mughal state service were not asked to abandon their old customs and beliefs. On the contrary, several non-Muslim rituals began to be integrated into an evolving Akbari political culture of governance. All this was evidently not compatible with the Naqshbandi Khwajas' perception of a Muslim state. A major task of the ruler with whom they had contact, as is illustrated from Khwaja Ahrar's relations with the rulers of his time, was not simply to ensure the comfort (*asa'ish*) and welfare (*rifahiyat*, *khair*) of the Muslims, but also to discourage and abolish the customs of strangers (*rusum-i biganagan*). In their view, Muslim society was to be totally free from the evil (*sharr*) of non-Muslim social practices.<sup>68</sup> Earlier Shaikh Baha al-Din Naqshband (d. 1389) had proclaimed that the distinctive feature of his *silsila* was a total conformity and obedience to the traditions of the Prophet and his venerable companions (*chang dar zail-i mutaba'at-i sunnat-i Mustafa zada im wa iqtida ba asar-i sahaba-i kiram-i u namuda*),

<sup>67</sup> Compare, for instance, John F. Richards, 'The formulation of imperial authority under Akbar and Jahangir', in Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam (eds.), *The Mughal State, 1526–1750* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 126–67; Iqtidar Alam Khan, 'The nobility under Akbar and the development of his religious policy, 1560–1580' in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1968, Parts 1–2; I.A. Khan, *The Political Biography of a Mughal Noble: Mun'im Khan Khan-i-Khanan, 1497–1575* (Delhi: Orient Longman, 1973), Introduction, pp. ix–xx.

<sup>68</sup> Compare *The Letters of Khwaja 'Ubayd Allah Ahrar and His Associates*, Persian text (ed.), Asom Urunbaev, English translation with notes by Jo-Ann Gross, Introductory essays by Jo-Ann Gross and Asom Urunbaev (Leiden: Brill, 2002), pp. 114, 128, 143, 145, 146, 166 and 169, letters nos. 49 (50), 59 (62), 282 (286), 284 (288), 304 (308) and 306 (310). See also Jürgen Paul, 'Forming a Faction', pp. 540–41. *Biganagan* means strangers, foreigners, which in the context implied the customs and practices introduced and established by the Mongols.

and that his followers formed a community of the perfect (*kamilan-i mukammal*), having attained high status because of their adherence to the path of the Prophet, and that best and the fastest way to the Truth was to provide relief to the heart of the Muslim.<sup>69</sup>

Although it is difficult to accept the understanding of some recent historians regarding the so-called ‘highly centralized absolutism’ or ‘highly systematized administration’ under Akbar, there is no denying the fact that the years between 1560 and 1575 saw a rapid change in the position of the Chaghatai nobles and this in the main was intended by the emperor to buttress the power around his person. The revolts by the old guard—the Mirzas, the Qaqshals and the Atka Khail, for instance—which followed and also precipitated measures aimed at weakening their strength, showed the intensity of their disapproval and resistance to this change. Their *jagirs* that they had hitherto held concentrated in a region were dispersed, while nearly all the civil and financial offices were now being staffed by the non-Chaghatai groups.<sup>70</sup> The fortunes of the Naqshbandis, who had an established affinity with the Chaghatais, according to one report, were ensured because of the high and unmatched strength of the latter in the early years of Akbar’s reign.<sup>71</sup> Their preeminence then would very likely suffer a serious setback in the wake of the increasing corrosion in the power of the Chaghatai nobles.

From the mid-1570s, we see the unmistakable signs of Akbar moving away from the pattern of Islamic rulership of the erstwhile Timurids, shared on occasion and in a measure with members of the nobility and the Naqshbandi Sufi lineage. Instead, Akbar favoured a kind of universal kingship, emphasizing an undisputed and all-encompassing power for the ruler. He now had a new capital of his empire, Fathpur Sikri, built in large measure in deference to the place’s association with a saint, but it was he, the emperor, not the place or the saint, who was to be lauded as the centre of authority in the new Timurid polity in India.<sup>72</sup> Critical as it was, this feature of the evolving Akbari dispensation of power clashed with Naqshbandi ideas regarding authority and kingship.

<sup>69</sup> Compare Khwaja Muhammad Parsa, *Qudsiyya (Kalimat-i Baha al-din Naqshbad)*, ed. Ahmad Taheri Iraqi (Tehran: Kitabkhana-i Tahuri, 1356 Shamsi/1975), p. 61 (text), 51 (Introduction); ‘Abd al-Rahman Jami, *Tariqa-i Khwajagan*, ed. ‘Abd al-Hayy Habibib (Kabul: Intishrat-i Anjuman-i Jami, 1962), p. 89.

<sup>70</sup> I.A. Khan, *The Political Biography*, Introduction.

<sup>71</sup> *Ma’asir al-Umara*, Vol. II, pp. 584–5.

<sup>72</sup> John F. Richards, ‘The Formulation of Imperial Authority’.

We have already summarized some key features regarding the position of Khwaja Ahrar. After him too, there were some other saints of the lineage who combined wealth with spiritual accomplishments to strengthen their intervention in the political domain. Khwaja Ju'ibari and Khwaja Mushtari, two members of the same family of Naqshbandi shaikhs in Uzbek-ruled Mawarannahr, were celebrated for their legendary wealth; and according to one report, from Turkestan to Khurasan, there was not a single city, desert or place where these Khwajas had not built a canal. One of them enjoyed a yearly income equal to the entire revenue collected by the Uzbeks from Samarqand, the other held over 2000 pieces of property, administered by his expert personal employees. They dominated the grain market, owned over 100 shops in Bukhara alone, and their joint property is said to have surpassed even that of Khwaja Ahrar.<sup>73</sup> In another case, Makhdum-i A'zam (d. 1543), a disciple of Maulana Muhammad Qazi (d. 1516), a noted *khalifa* of Khwaja Ahrar established an ascendancy over the ruler of Kashghar in the same way as had Khwaja Ahrar over Sultan Abu Sa'id, and the power in his family remained for decades, until in 1678 one of his descendants, Khwaja Afaq managed to dislodge the ruler in Yarkand and became the ruler himself.<sup>74</sup> The power to terminate and appropriate the authority of a king was thus within the realm of a Naqshbandi shaikh's political activity. We have already noticed how disobedience to Khwaja Ahrar led to the elimination of Mirza 'Abd-Allah, the ruler of Samarqand. We may also note the following statement attributed to him by the author of *Rashhat 'Ain al-Hayat*:

'If we acted only as a shaikh in this age, no other shaikh would find a disciple. But another task has been assigned to us, to protect the Muslims from the evil of oppressors, and for the sake of this we must traffic with kings and conquer their souls, thus achieving the purpose of the Muslims. *God Almighty*

<sup>73</sup> Compare David W. Damrel, 'Forgotten grace: Khwaja Khawand Mahmud Naqshbandi in Central Asia and Mughal India', Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Department of Religion, Duke University, 1991, pp. 80–1. Damrel cites Mansura Haider, 'Agrarian system in Uzbek Khanates of Central Asia', *Turcica*, Vol. 7, 1974, pp. 157–78, and Haider, 'Urban classes in the Uzbek Khanates, XVI-XVII Centuries' in Graciela de la Lama (ed.), *Central Asia: Papers Presented at the 30th International Congress of Human Sciences in Asia and North Africa* (Mexico City: El Colegio de Mexico, 1976); Richard C. Foltz, *Mughal India and Central Asia* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 97–9.

<sup>74</sup> Compare Robert Barkley Shaw, 'The History of Khwajas of Eastern Turkistan' (ed. N. Elias) in *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. 66, Part 1, (1899), and René Grousset, *Empire of the Steppe*, cited in Algar, 'Political aspects of Naqshbandi history', p. 128.

in His grace has bestowed on me such power that if I wish I can, with a single letter, cause the Chinese emperor who claims divinity to abandon his monarchy and come running over thorns to my threshold. But with all this power I await God's command: whenever He wills, His command reaches me and is executed'.<sup>75</sup>

Later Naqshbandi Ahrari shaikhs, who had a strong memory of a share in power, would then have found it difficult to adjust to a political environment where the king did far more than simply assert his sole authority. Akbar, for example, had the audacity to throw overboard the shaikh's recommendation, and that too when it came from a scion of the great Naqshbandi lineage. Quite noticeably, therefore, Akbar moved away from the Naqshbandis. The emperor had lately begun to see the seeds of a formidable challenge to his plan for power and political preeminence in the activities of several supporters of the Naqshbandi lineage at the court of his half-brother Mirza Hakim, in Kabul. A glimmering of these sentiments is evident from events in the 1580s. While his nobles and deputies were assigned the task of suppressing serious rebellions. In Gujarat and the east, Akbar, himself, commanded the expedition to deal with Mirza Hakim in the Punjab.<sup>76</sup> We will see below that Kabul served as the centre for relaunching the Naqshbandi order in India, even after the termination of Mirza Hakim's regime.

In the late 1570s Akbar had favoured the Chishti order. This is not to suggest that the Chishti saints' concerns were purely spiritual, with no taste whatsoever for power and politics. Their past too had seen cases of their conflict with rulers.<sup>77</sup> A significant feature of their politics had, however, been their support to rulers in their endeavour to adjust the nature of Muslim power to the Indian environment.<sup>78</sup> Again, no Chishti shaikh ever amassed wealth comparable to that of Khwaja Ahrar, with a mission to reform a political regime, reward those who would listen to his exhortations and become submissive, and punish the ones who dared act independently. On the contrary, the

<sup>75</sup> Cited in Algar 'The Naqshbandi order: A preliminary survey of its history and significance' in *Studia Islamica*, Vol. 44 (1976), pp. 123–52. Emphasis mine.

<sup>76</sup> Subrahmanyam, 'A note on the Kabul Kingdom'; Faruqi, 'The Forgotten Prince'.

<sup>77</sup> Digby, 'The Sufi Shaykh and the Sultan: A conflict of claims to authority' in *Iran*, Vol. 27 (1990), pp. 71–81; Sunil Kumar, 'Assertions of authority: A study of the discursive statements of two Sultans of Delhi' in M. Alam, F.N. Delvoye and M. Gaboriau (eds.), *The Making of Indo-Persian Culture: Indian and French Studies* (Delhi: Manohar, 2000), pp. 37–65.

<sup>78</sup> For a discussion around this question, see Muzaffar Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam: India 1200–1800* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004), pp. 81–114.

Chishtis had generally pleaded for a kind of asceticism, and preferred to advise and bless the political authorities from a distance. Indeed, their *tasawwuf* has been based on a doctrine, i.e. *wahdat al-wujud*, which had hitherto facilitated the process of religious synthesis and cultural amalgam. In some Chishti treatises of Akbar's time, the doctrine was expressed and elaborated in a much more forceful tone, even with a plea for the illegitimacy of considering Islam as superior to any other religion. 'The whole world is a manifestation of love (*'ishq*)', to quote from one such treatise, 'and we see everything as perfect (...). As you begin *iradat* (become a *murid* and join the order) you stop quarrelling over *kuf*r and *iman*. There is no precedence of one religion over the other (...). After you experience the limitlessness of unbounded Beauty you can see His Grace present both in a *kafir* and a Muslim'.<sup>79</sup> Nothing could have provided a stronger support to 'Akbar's dream'.

Akbar's visits to the shrine of Khwaja Mu'in al-Din, the founder of the Chishti *silsila* in India best illustrates his fascination with the order. Here it is also interesting to note the circumstances in which the emperor, according to Abu al-Fazl, was drawn towards the Khwaja. One night, while on a hunting expedition, Abu al-Fazl writes, he heard people singing Hindi verses in praise of the Khwaja, in a village near Agra. The emperor was impressed by the saint's popularity, would often discuss his 'perfections and miracles', and developed a 'strong inclination' to visit the shrine.<sup>80</sup> As we know, the emperor undertook several journeys to Ajmer, one of which was also on foot, all the way from Fathpur to the holy city of the saint. He also constructed several buildings around the shrine, arranged for its management and provided grants for the care and comfort of the visitors. Furthermore, in 1564 in Delhi, he visited the tomb of Nizam al-Din Auliya, while in 1569 he began the construction of palaces in Fathpur Sikri. This was selected as the site of his new capital, a token of respect for a living Chishti saint, Shaikh Salim Chishti, through whose prayers

<sup>79</sup> Compare Mir 'Abd al-Wahid Bilgrami, *Sab' Sanabil*, Urdu trans., Muhammad Khalil Barakati (Bheondi, Maharashtra: Rizwi Kitabghar, 1981), pp. 330–1. Bilgrami wrote the treatise in Persian, of which the original is still unpublished, in 969AH/1562. Later in 974/1567 he compiled the better known, *Haqa'iq-i Hindi*, in which he gave Islamic meanings to the words and expressions explicitly 'Hindu'.

<sup>80</sup> *Akbarnama*, Vol. II, p. 154, English trans., p. 237; P.M. Currie, *The Shrine and Cult of Mu'in al-Din of Ajmer* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 100; K.A. Nizami, *Akbar and Religion* (Delhi: Idarah-i-Adabiyat-i-Dilli, 1989), p. 104.

he believed he was blessed with a son who was named after the Shaikh.<sup>81</sup>

By the 1570s, Akbar thus appeared as an exclusive devotee of the Chishti saints, both dead and alive. In 1581, on his way to the Punjab he visited the *khanqah* of another major Chishti saint of the period, Shaikh Jalal al-Din, in Thanesar. This visit is of special importance for us, since the grand old shaikh was a noted *khalifa* of Shaikh 'Abd al-Quddus Gangohi. Akbar was accompanied by the brothers Abu al-Fazl and Faizi. They had a long conversation with the shaikh, discussed with him the secrets of Divine Realities and mystical sensibilities (*haqa'iq wa ma'arif*). The emperor, as the recorded memory in later Chishti *tazkiras* remember, was so impressed with the shaikh's response that he even expressed a desire to give up kingship. The shaikh, however, dissuaded him from doing so. He is reported to have said:

'First you find a person who can match you and sit [on the throne] in your place, and then come for this work (. . .). Your justice for an hour is better than the prayers of a thousand of saints. Piety and sainthood for you lies in your being just to God's people (*khalq-i Khuda*) and in conferring benefits upon them. Remember God. Kingship does not prevent you from remembering Him'.<sup>82</sup>

Did Akbar recognize the Chishtis then as royal *pirs*? There is nothing in our sources to suggest an answer to this in the positive. What did Akbar expect a Sufi to be? Which Sufis did he like to be close to? We are provided an answer to these questions in the following remark by Abu al-Fazl on Mirza Sharaf al-Din's revolt (which we have noticed above). This remark also supports and in a measure reiterates the reasons that were given above for the decline of the fortunes of Naqshbandis. He writes:

It is an old custom for the divinely great and for acute rulers to attach to themselves the hearts of dervishes and the sons of dervishes. And they have exhibited this tendency, which is both an intoxicant which destroys men, and sometimes as a means of testing their real nature. If the matter be looked into with the eye of justice, it will be evident to the prudent and awakened-hearts, that the favour shown by the Shahinshah to this father and son exhibited both motives. Accordingly the concomitants of His Majesty's

<sup>81</sup> Richards, 'Formulation of Imperial Authority'; Currie, *The Shrine and Cult of Mu'in al-Din*, pp. 99–102 and 152–4; Nizami, *Akbar and Religion*, pp. 104–5, 111 and 117.

<sup>82</sup> Muhammad Akram ibn Shaikh Muhammad 'Ali ibn Shaikh Ilah Bakhsh, *Sawati' al-Anwar*, British Library, India Office Ms. Ethé 652 (I.O. Islamic 2705), fols. 389b–390b; 'Abd al-Rahman Chishti, *Mir'at al-Asrar*, British Library, Ms. Or. 216.

fortune withdrew in a short time the veil from the face of Mirza Sharaf al-Din Husain's actions, and his real worthlessness and insubstantiality became manifest to mankind. When God, the world-protector, wills to cleanse the site of the eternal dominion from the evil and black-hearted, and to deck it with the sincere and loyal, a state of things spontaneously arises which could not be produced by a thousand planning. The hypocrites depart from the threshold of fortune by the efforts of their own feet and fall into destruction. Such was the evil-ending case of Mirza Sharaf al-Din Husain, who by influence of the man-throwing wine of the world did not remain firm of foot, but left his place, and into whose head there entered thoughts of madness and melancholy.<sup>83</sup>

It is time now for us to return to the question that was posed at the end of the first section of this essay. We know that Abu al-Fazl wrote his history, in which he included a brief, three-line, description of 'Abd al-Quddus Gangohi, in the 1590s, a time when the Akbari dispensation had in a sense been fully formed. While he does not neglect regards for the truth, the basic duty of a historian, his portrayal of the developments of the earlier years in several cases is influenced by the particular ideology and concerns of this late phase of Akbar's rule. We also know that he was not a mere chronicler. He had his own philosophy of life and social order, and propounded, promoted and defended the ideology of this dispensation. He wrote history with a mission. Now, in order to appreciate the significance of this particular case we may also note the following points. Firstly, the description of the shaikh as noted above is very brief indeed. Secondly, one line of this brief notice, which comprises the information about Humayun's visit and his meeting with the shaikh, begins with the word *guyand*, i.e. they say or it is said,<sup>84</sup> which in a measure implies it is based on a kind of hearsay or on something remembered and constructed by the associates of the shaikh himself. This also means that while Abu al-Fazl wants his audience and posterity to take note of what is recounted, he is not particularly concerned with its truth. Again, we know that Gangohi was the royal *pir* of the enemies of the Mughals, supported them and on that count suffered humiliation at the hands

<sup>83</sup> *Akbarnama*, Vol. II, p. 195, English trans., p. 303.

<sup>84</sup> '*Guyand Jannat Ashyani ba barkhi az kar agahan bezaviya-i u dar shudi va anjuman-i agahi garmi pizirafiti*'. Abu al-Fazl generally seems to be very meticulous in his choice of words to indicate the evidence and degree of authenticity of what he describes. While describing a person's descent and family line, for instance, if he is certain about it he prefers the simple, '*ast*' or '*and*', that is to say: is or are. In cases for which he wants to remain non-committal, he would use expression like '*khud ra az (. . .) nazhad bar shamurd*', i.e. 'he counted himself Saiyid-born'. Cf. *Ain-i Akbari*, pp. 211 and 214, for example.

of the Mughals. The memory of these details, already recorded, and incorporated in the *tazkira* of the shaikh written by his son, repeatedly read in the circle of the shaikh's associates and followers, threatened to affect adversely the good relations that Akbar had developed with the Chishtis and which Abu al-Fazl applauded. There was however also the memory of the shaikh's efforts to restore his own relations with the Mughals, as we can guess from the letters he wrote to Babur, Humayun and Tardi Beg. The shaikh also seems to have visited Agra in 1537 for a brief stay just before his death.<sup>85</sup> And, it is not unlikely that the efforts in this direction continued in the changed political atmosphere to create conditions of friendship with the new rulers, and that in the process there also emerged stories of the emperor's meeting with the shaikh. Since the Mughal court's contact with the Chishtis was in practice an endorsement of Abu al-Fazl's own ideology, he promotes the memory of this anecdote bearing on an intimate contact between the two. He does not even allude to anything from the shaikh's life pertaining to the time of the Afghan rule, for he wants his readers to forget everything that invoked the memory of the Mughals' distance from him. His aim is to emphasize the necessity and significance of the Mughal court's good relations with the Chishtis. If at all a king needed—which in Abu al-Fazl's view, he did indeed—to 'attach to himself the hearts of dervishes', such dervishes in India should be the Chishtis, and certainly not the Mawarannahri Naqshbandis.

Interestingly, Abu al-Fazl is the sole authority cited for this anecdote in the later Chishti *tazkiras*, as if his was a piece of contemporary evidence, by an eyewitness to the event. Obviously, in these *tazkiras* were added words and phrases, implying that Humayun had regular meetings with the shaikh, the same way as the earlier Afghan rulers had had.<sup>86</sup> A seventeenth-century non-Chishti account, however, mentions the anecdote without referring to Abu al-Fazl.<sup>87</sup> It is relevant here also to note that in the oft-cited Mughal–Sufi *tazkira*, written by Shaikh 'Abd al-Haqq Dehlavi (d. 1642) about the same time as Abu al-Fazl wrote his history, this anecdote finds no place, even though Dehlavi's account of Gangohi is pretty detailed, comprising over 1400

<sup>85</sup> Compare Digby, 'Shaikh Abd al-Quddus Gangohi'.

<sup>86</sup> *Mir'at al-Asrar*, fol. 427; *Sawati' al-Anwar*, fol. 381a.

<sup>87</sup> Muhammad Sadiq Isfahani, *Tabaqat-i Shahjahani*, British Library, India Office Ms., Ethé 705, fol. 195b.

words.<sup>88</sup> This may be because Dehlavi did not share Abu al-Fazl's concern, and also his primary connection was with the Qadiri *silsila*.

Akbar for his part retained his faith in Khwaja Mu'in al-Din, and thereby remained in contact with the Chishtis, even after what Bada'uni and some Naqshbandis projected as the emperor's rejection of Islam.<sup>89</sup> In return the emperor too received noticeable appreciation from Chishti circles. If Abu al-Fazl is to be believed, on the occasion of one of his visits to Ajmer, the people connected with the shrine told the emperor that they saw the Khwaja in a dream saying: 'If he (Akbar) knew the amount of his own spirituality, he would not bestow a glance on me, the sitter-in-the dust of the path of studentship'.<sup>90</sup> At the time of his visit to Shaikh Jalal al-Din in Thanesar, the old shaikh, who because of his advanced age would generally keep lying in bed, in a half conscious state, asked his attendants to give him support to stand up and welcome the emperor, 'the Caliph of the age'. In the seventeenth-century Chishti *tazkiras*, Akbar is remembered and mentioned as a just and pious king, devoted to Khwaja Mu'in al-Din, and also on occasion with the Arabic phrases such as *rahima-hu Allah* (may God bless him) and *anar Allahu burhana-hu* (may God illumine his proof),<sup>91</sup> which are generally used for saints.

### The Return of the Naqshbandi Shaikhs

We have seen that the Naqshbandis came to India along with the Mughals. But far from being the royal *pirs* as they had been in Central Asia, they could not manage to maintain good relations with the Mughal rulers. In the society outside the charmed circle of the ruling class too, they made little mark as notable Sufi shaikhs. In the Indian conditions, they noticed that the other shaikhs, the Chishtis most prominently, had greater appeal and that the Naqshbandis' heritage

<sup>88</sup> Shakh 'Abd al-Haqq Dehlavi, *Akhbar al-Akhyar* (Deoband: Kutubkhana Rahimiya, n.d.), pp. 227–30.

<sup>89</sup> *Mutakhab al-Tawarikh*, Vol. II, pp. 272–3.

<sup>90</sup> *Akbarnama*, Vol. II, p. 324, English trans., p. 477. This incident, characterized by Nizami as sycophancy (*Akbar and Religion*, p. 104), could also be taken as an illustration of how Akbar gradually grew antithetical to Sufism. For a discussion around this dimension of Akbar's politics, see Bruce Lawrence, 'Veiled Opposition to Sufis in Muslim Asia' in Frederick de Jong and Bernd Radke (eds.), *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), pp. 436–51.

<sup>91</sup> *Mir'at al-Asrar*, fol. 236a; *Sawati' al-Anwar*, fol. 389b.

of explicitly combining power (or *wilayat*) with rulership had, in a measure, stood in the way of their achieving the high position they wanted and aspired to. They thus had to reckon with the existing popular Sufi orders, assert and establish the supremacy of their own order and emphasize how it was the best, and that how even in matters relating to the principle and practice of poverty and asceticism (*faqr, tark-i dunya*) they were really far ahead of the Chishtis. They always remained within the limits of the traditions of the Prophet, and stated that their primary task was to achieve 'the purpose of the Muslims', even as they engaged with worldly politics and trafficked with kings.

Two further major Naqshbandi saints, Khwaja Khawand Mahmud 'Alavi Husaini (d. 1652) and Khwaja Baqi-Billah (d. 1603), came to India and established their *khanqahs* during Akbar's reign. Khawand Mahmud was perhaps the first to be directed by his *pir*, Shaikh Muhammad Ishaq Dehbidi (d. 1599) to come to India to propagate the Naqshbandi mission. Thereupon he joined a caravan and set out for Lahore. When he arrived in the town of Gujarat in the Punjab where the road bifurcated, one path leading to Kashmir, the other to Lahore, he fell into a mystic trance and his horse took the route of Kashmir. After he regained consciousness, he decided to continue his journey in the direction of Kashmir, thinking that this was what God and his master would have wanted. He settled in Kashmir, and though initially he had some difficulty, succeeded in establishing the order on a firm footing in the Valley. His son and successor, Khwaja Mu'in al-Din (d. 1674) also was a prominent saint in the Valley. Khawand Mahmud's influence, despite his efforts to come close to some nobles in Delhi and Agra, did not really extend beyond the Valley.<sup>92</sup>

It was hence Khwaja Muhammad Baqi-Billah—a member of the family of Khwaja Ahrar from his mother's side—who took up the challenge of reinstating the Naqshbandi order in the heartland of Mughal Hindustan. He came to settle in Delhi from Kabul in 1599, inspired and perfected in the order by Khwaja Muhammad Muqtada Amkinagi (d. 1600). He had earlier been to India, lived and wandered in Sambhal, Lahore and Kashmir. He lived very briefly in Delhi, for slightly over 4 years, but before his premature death in 1603 he had

<sup>92</sup> S.A.A. Rizvi, *A History of Sufism*, Vol. II, pp. 181–5. For a comprehensive discussion of Khawand Mahmud's career, see David W. Damrel, 'Forgotten grace: Khwaja Khawand Mahmud Naqshbandi in Central Asia and Mughal India', Ph.D. Dissertation, Department of Religion, Duke University, 1991. See also Shamsuddin Ahmad, *Hazrat Khwaja Naqshband aur Tariqat-i Naqshbandiya* (in Urdu) (Srinagar: Gulshan Publishers, 2001), pp. 358–407.

virtually reinstated the Naqshbandi order.<sup>93</sup> He left behind four major *khalifas*, Shaikh Ilahtad (d. 1640), Shaikh Husam al-Din (d. 1633), Shaikh Taj al-Din Sambhali (d. 1642) and Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi (d. 1624). Of these, the last two occupied prominent positions in strengthening and propagating the teachings of the order in India and abroad in the Islamic lands in the seventeenth century. Sirhindi, we know, also founded a new branch, the Mujaddidi, of the order.<sup>94</sup>

There is plenty of information about the nature of Baqi-Billah's *tasawwuf* and *karamat* in the contemporary and near-contemporary writings of his disciples and *khalifas*, and also in the *tazkiras* compiled during the seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries. For the following discussion, however, I have drawn in the main on his own writings, i.e. *malfuzat* (table-talk) and *maktubat* (letters) and poetry, edited and published together with his poems in one volume, by two leading twentieth-century Naqshbandi–Mujaddidi scholars.<sup>95</sup> I will select a few issues here, which in his view were the distinctive features of the order and are in a measure also illustrative of a rather combative overtone. He compares the features of his order with those of the other orders, the Chishti in particular, pointing succinctly to the flaws of the latter. He emphasizes and stresses on the dimensions of mystical sensitivity (*wajd*, *zauq*), without losing contact with mundane power. Regarding the *pir*, for instance, he observes that according to the Naqshbandi order there could be more than one *pir*. For the *pir* as the Chishti and the Suhrawardi shaikhs understood it was not simply the one from whom the seeker received *khirqa* (robe). There were other two categories of *pir* as well, which he characterized as the *pir-i talim* who gives training in litanics, and the *pir-i suhbat* whose company resulted in general benefit and in enabling the seeker to appreciate the diverse avenues of spiritual progress.<sup>96</sup> Baqi-Billah thus was keen to initiate into his *silsila*, even those who already had their *pirs*, of the Chishti, Suhrawardi or any other lineage, in India. This amounted to making a bid to extend the domain of his own order, even if it meant violation of generally accepted Sufi practice. In this connection it is

<sup>93</sup> Rizvi, *A History of Sufism*, Vol. II, pp. 185–93; Rizvi, 'Sixteenth century Naqshbandiyya leadership in India', in Gaborieau, Popovic and Zarccone, *Naqshbandis*, pp. 153–65.

<sup>94</sup> Rizvi, *A History of Sufism*, Vol. II, pp. 195–263 and 336–8.

<sup>95</sup> Khwaja Muhammad Baqi-Billah, *Kulliyat-i Baqi-Billah*, ed. Abul Hasan Zaid Faruqi and Burhan Ahmad Faruqi (Lahore: Din Muhammad and Sons, n.d.).

<sup>96</sup> Kulliyat-i Baqi-Billah, Section Malfuzat, pp. 31–2.

interesting to note the following passage, which explains why he did as above:

Someone reported in the presence of Hazrat-i Ishan (Baqi-Billah) that a certain person [the author hints at Nizam al-Din Thanasari, a leading Chishti shaikh, but does not mention his name] says that Hazrat-i Ishan emancipates seekers from having faith in former *pirs* and insists that they receive teaching only from him. He (Baqi-Billah) said this was not the case. 'But if I find some of the seekers in two minds, I advise them to concentrate on one path (. . .)'. Then he said that the faith that he had in the shaikhs of the other *silsilas* is hardly found among them. In particular, the people of India's beliefs about their *pirs* verge on idolatory.<sup>97</sup>

But while for him, and for that matter for any other *shaikh* of his order, it was legitimate to allure the followers of other *silsilas*, he did not allow the *murid* of a Naqshbandi to seek guidance from any other *pir* in India. Elaborating on the relationship between the seeker and the preceptor, he wrote to his *khalifa*, Shaikh Taj al-Din:

And similarly in the moral conduct (*adab*) of the Naqshbandi Ahrari path you should be firm like a mountain, never mixing it with the path of the other (. . .). Whoever is your *murid* is *your* *murid only*. Train and teach him according to Naqshbandi path only (. . .). Of what interest is the person who receives the light from you and then attends upon a Shattari [shaikh]?<sup>98</sup>

With reference to the discourse on *tauhid* and *wujud*, we are aware that the Chishtis in India followed Ibn al-'Arabi (d. 1240) and maintained that the position of 'Ala al-Daula Simnani (d. 1336), who contested Ibn al-'Arabi's stand and propounded a contrary view, was not correct. Baqi-Billah for his part took a different stand. He proposed that both Ibn al-'Arabi and Simnani were right. Still, while he tried to reconcile the two views and suggested that the difference between them was only in words rather than in deeper substance, he argued that Simnani was closer to the truth:

His (Simnani's) *shuhud* (perception) is the most perfect *shuhud*. The difference is that a group of the '*ulama* [read: Indian Sufis] believe that things do not exist objectively and that their external appearance is only like the appearance of the reflections in a mirror. In sum, they recognize only one existence. The shaikh [Simnani] with his power of perception (*shuhud*) and its pre-eminence recognized the objective existence of things too".<sup>99</sup>

<sup>97</sup> *Kulliyat-i Baqi-Billah*, Section *Malfuzat*, p. 35.

<sup>98</sup> *Kulliyat-i Baqi-Billah*, Section *Ruq'at*, p. 77.

<sup>99</sup> *Kulliyat-i Baqi-Billah*, Section *Ruq'at*, p. 123.

Further, Baqi-Billah firmly rejected the Chishtis' understanding of *tauhid*. He openly challenged Shaikh Nizam al-Din Thanasari—nephew and son-in-law of Jalal al-Din Thanasari, who after the latter's death was virtually the sole spokesman of the Sabiri branch of the Chishti order—to debate him about the matter and prove his position if he was right, in an assembly of *'ulama* and Sufis. In the circle of his associates, the belief was that Thanasari, even if he was considered to be the most perfect Indian dervish, did not possess adequate knowledge and mystical sensitivity to appreciate Simnani's observations on Reality, and that his understanding was based on wrong and misleading translations and interpretations. Baqi-Billah was aware of the intensity of such offensive opinion (*gustakhi*). But he asserted that he was constrained to express himself thus with the sole objective of disseminating and protecting the position of the true sect and bringing forth the correct meanings of the utterances of the great shaikhs. He wanted, or so he claimed, to save the people from being misled and thus sinking into the whirlpool of mistaken belief. He wrote further that often the illumination experienced by a Sufi in an early stage of his mystical journey was taken as the real epiphany (*tajalli*). This was an error and was just a reflection of, and not the real light of, *tajalli*.<sup>100</sup> This assumes special import considering that the Mawarannahri Naqshbandis, including the great Ahrar and Shaikh 'Abd al-Rahman Jami, were mostly *wujudis*.<sup>101</sup>

Baqi-Billah's competitive attitude towards his contemporary Chishti shaikhs is further illustrated from his observations on *sama'* or Sufi music. *Sama'* had come to be an integral part of Chishti Sufi life, and was regarded as a means to experience and achieve the spiritually sublime; in this, the order drew support from the life and teachings of the early great saints, whose Sufi accomplishments the Naqshbandis

<sup>100</sup> *Kulliyat-i Baqi-Billah*, Section *Ruq'at*, p. 118.

<sup>101</sup> Algar, 'A brief history', and J.G.J. ter Haar, 'The Naqshbandi tradition in the eyes of Ahmad Sirhindi', in Gaborieau, Popovic and Zarcone (eds.), *Naqshbandis*, pp. 21 and 89–90 for references to the *wahdat al-wujud* leanings of Khwaja Baha al-Din Naqshband's disciple, Khwaja Muhammad Parsa, Ubaid-Allah Ahrar and his disciple, 'Abd al-Rahman Jami (d. 1492). The majority of Jami's writings involve either commentaries on Ibn al-'Arabi or elaborations in prose or poetry of his ideas of *wujud*. See for instance, Jami's *Naqd al-Nusus fi Sharh Naqsh al-Fusus*, ed. William C. Chittick (Tehran: Mu'assas Pazhohish-i Hikmat wa Falsafa-i Iran, 1991), Editor's Introduction. See also, James Winston Morris, 'Ibn 'Arabi and His Intrepreters, Part II: Influences and Intrepretations' in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 107, No. 1 (1987), pp. 101–19; Claude Addas, *The Quest for the Red Sulphur, The Life of Ibn 'Arabi* (Cambridge: The Islamic Text Society, 1993), p. 291.

also recognized. Baqi-Billah however contested their reading and interpretation of their predecessors. He took up the case of Shaikh Nizam al-Din Auliya, since his practice was the most oft-cited evidence in support of musical practices, and remarked that in his *malfuzat* where Nizam al-Din discussed the legality of *sama'*, he appended the condition that the listener should be a true lover of God. This evidently meant, Baqi-Billah added, that he disapproved of its practice. True love of God, Baqi-Billah added, required total and unqualified submission to the path (*sunna*) of the Prophet. A true follower of his path would never indulge in an act for which there was no precedent in the life of the Prophet. The Prophet never listened to music nor did he ever permit its performance.<sup>102</sup> The Indian Sufis failed in getting at the correct meaning of the discourses in the texts composed in India too, as they misunderstood and misinterpreted Ibn al-'Arabi and Simnani. Islam in India was to be as Baqi-Billah saw it, whatever its practice in the past.

In all this obviously lay the critique of basis of the prevailing understanding of *tasawwuf*. 'Our *tariqa*', Baqi-Billah noted, 'is based on three things: an unswerving faith (*rusukh*) in the truth of the beliefs of the Sunni community (*ahl-i sunnat wa jama'at*), knowledge, gnosis (*agahi*) and prayer (*'ibadat*). Laxity in any one of these throws one out of our *tariqa*'.<sup>103</sup> The principal duty of a seeker, according to him, was to follow the *shari'a*. 'Correct beliefs', he reiterated, 'regard for *shari'a* and sincere attention to God are the greatest wealth. No mysticism (*zauq, wijdan*) is comparable with this'.<sup>104</sup> Indeed, the ultimate aim for him was to achieve what the earlier shaikhs of his lineage characterized as *musalmani*. When a seeker asked him about its implications, he said: '*Musalmani* is the *murad* [the desired goal, but it] is difficult'. It is achieved only with divine grace, and is beyond the circle of human effort. To become a *musalman* is the very reality (*haqiqah*) of mysticism (*ma'rifa*).<sup>105</sup> In one of his letters, he elaborates on the question saying that beauty (*jamal*) and perfection (*kamal*) in a seeker follows from his submission (*bandagi*), which meant prayer, fasting, alms-giving, *hajj*, war with the infidels, regard for the rights of the parents and others, and justice.<sup>106</sup>

<sup>102</sup> Kulliyat-i Baqi-Billah, Section Malfuzat, pp. 42–3.

<sup>103</sup> *Kulliyat-i Baqi-Billah*, Section *Malfuzat*, p. 25.

<sup>104</sup> *Kulliyat-i Baqi-Billah*, Section *Malfuzat*, p. 36.

<sup>105</sup> *Kulliyat-i Baqi-Billah*, Section *Malfuzat*, p. 29 and Section *Ruq'at*, p. 137.

<sup>106</sup> *Kulliyat-i Baqi-Billah*, Section *Ruq'at*, p. 139.

Furthermore, Baqi-Billah pleaded for the need to insist on maintaining the distinction between infidelity (*kuf̄r*) and faith (*iman*). He dismissed as heretic (*zandaqa*) and extremely stupid (*ablahi, safahat*) the idea that encouraged words implying abandoning of the *shari'a*, admiration of unbelief and emphasis on the basic unity between a believer and an infidel.<sup>107</sup> A measure of the intensity in his attitude on the matter was reflected in his resistance to the idea of treatment by a Hindu physician during his illness. He relented as he was told that this was only arranged at his mother's wish. Still, he did not like the presence of the physician and turned his face away from him when he visited.<sup>108</sup>

It is however significant that together with these statements—addressed to the Indian shaikhs in the main in a rather uncompromising and aggressive tone—he also disapproved a Sufi's direct involvement in power and money making. He thus discouraged a feature of Ahrari *wilayat*, which had hitherto legitimated the drive of a Naqshbandi shaikh to aspire for a position alongside the ruler, at least, if not above him. As we have already noticed, this was one of the factors that alienated the Mughal emperor Akbar. To Baqi-Billah, *musalmāni* or the highest stage in *tasawwuf* was to be accomplished with poverty (*faqr*) and negation of self (*nisti*),<sup>109</sup> and not with power and wealth. He showed no direct concern for power politics; but he was in close contact with people at the helm of affairs, and spared no chance in recommending the cases of his associates and disciples.

Among others, he recommended the case of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi for an adequate cash grant.<sup>110</sup> Of the 86 of his letters available to us, no less than 13 were addressed to people engaged in state service and trade. His addressees included Shaikh Farid Bukhari, who according to a report bore all the expenses of his *khanqah*,<sup>111</sup> Mirza 'Aziz Koka and the *sadr al-sudur*, Miran Sadr-i Jahan Pihani. Some of these recipients have been mentioned by the compiler as his sincere devotees (*az 'umara-i mukhlis*), but it is not clear if they really became his *murids*.

Baqi-Billah used all his strength and accomplishments to reinstall the Naqshbandi *silsila* as a great, if not the greatest, mystic order in Mughal India. He joined issue with the contemporary saints of the other orders, and tried to demonstrate the supremacy of his order.

<sup>107</sup> *Kulliyat-i Baqi-Billah*, Section *Ruq'at*, pp. 122–3.

<sup>108</sup> *Kulliyat-i Baqi-Billah*, Section *Malfuzat*, pp. 49–50.

<sup>109</sup> *Kulliyat-i Baqi-Billah*, Section *Malfuzat*, pp. 130–1.

<sup>110</sup> *Kulliyat-i Baqi-Billah*, Section *Malfuzat* pp. 91, 93, 98, 105, 107, 118, 120, 130, 133, 134 and 135.

<sup>111</sup> *Kulliyat-i Baqi-Billah*, Section *Malfuzat*, p. 36.

He disapproved of several features of prevailing Sufi culture that lent strength to some important features of the Akbari dispensation. He also hinted that it was purification of things Indian and their redefinition that the mission of his coming to Hindustan was. Nowhere, however, did he actually comment upon their legality or illegality, let alone pronouncing a verdict on the very faith of the emperor. On this question, his approach seems to be different from the one we generally associate with his noted disciple, Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi. Can we assume that this was because he died prematurely, leaving his mission incomplete while still mobilizing his strength? We are discouraged from following this line of speculation by the fact that Sirhindi, howsoever powerful he may have been, was not the sole spokesman of the Naqshbandi order after his death. But this is a major question which still demands careful examination, and which should be dealt with elsewhere.

### Conclusion

This essay has traced the relationship between the Mughal dynasty in India and various groups of Sufi shaikhs over the course of the sixteenth century. Rather than focusing exclusively, or even largely, on the Naqshbandi–Mujaddidi tradition of the early-seventeenth century, we have attempted to look to the competition between various orders of Sufis for influence over the Mughals. In this, the central role is played by the competitive axis between the Chishtis and the Naqshbandis, the former having exercised considerable influence over the Afghans while the latter were, in a manner of speaking, the ‘ancestral’ saints of the Central Asian Timurids. We have seen how the mainstream of the Ahrari Naqshbandi tradition from Transoxiana failed eventually for a number of reasons to consolidate its hold in India during the reign of Humayun, leading to the brief ascendancy of the Shattari order. Eventually, after a phase of Chishti reassertion that characterizes the early years of Akbar’s rule (and his relations with both Ajmer, and the more proximate figure of Shaikh Salim Chishti), the Naqshbandis were able to rally themselves. This is in no small measure because of the key role played by Khwaja Baqi-Billah, the master of the celebrated Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi, in reinventing both an aspect of their theology and their concrete functioning as an order.

A fuller consideration of Mughal–Sufi relations would naturally take us to a proper examination of events and processes of the

seventeenth century, which lack of space has prevented me from doing here. That consideration would also require a further, careful investigation of the role played by members of the Chishti order in the seventeenth century, including the key personage of ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti (mentioned only in passing in this essay). It is only by examining the full range of materials produced both by different orders about themselves, and about each other, while keeping the political compulsions that shaped the choices of the Mughal emperors and their elites, that we may grasp the intricacies and complexities of this field. This essay has thus been a modest first step in the direction of a far larger enterprise.