

Women's Presence in Sufi *Silsilas*

This chapter studies three aspects of women's presence within the Sufi hierarchical institutions organized and managed as *silsilas*: at the beginner's level, i.e., their initiation as disciples (*murīda/murīd*); women's presence within the Sufi hierarchy as *khalīfas* with authority to teach, instruct, and enroll disciples; and their presence in the *khānqāhs* and Sufi lodges. Women's initiation in the Sufi *ṭarīqa*, similar to the issue of women's testimony in legal affairs, has caused dichotomy among the Muslim jurists and the scholars. In light of Ibn al-ʿArabi's (d. 638/1240) comment that there were women among the highest rank of the Sufis, i.e., the forty *abdāl*, the general attitude of the Sufis restricting women's initiation appears perplexing and therefore calls for further investigation.¹

The Sufi *silsilas* at their core were male institutions; their intrinsic organisational pattern with the appointment of successors, conferment of *walāya*, and a well-managed system of keeping a close watch on the activities of the *murīdīn*, *khalīfas*, and in some cases on the income through unsolicited donations and grants (*futuḥ*), all bespeak of a well-respected and superbly managed system that can aptly be compared with the administrative systems of kingdoms and sultanates. Similar to the ruling dynasties, each *silsila* followed a *ṭarīqa* (spiritual path) created by a Shaikh and, hence, bore his name. Again, falling within similar power dynamics that are common within these two opposite male power domains, the Sufi *silsila* also go through division and bifurcation; this divisiveness mostly remains couched in the name of spiritual inspiration, though cases of severe conflicts are also known and are on record. Similar to the political-military boundaries of empires, the Sufi's jurisdiction (*wilāyat*) was specific and well-marked. Thus, a man named ʿAbdullah Rūmī, before setting out on a journey from Ajodhan to Multan, requested Shaikh Farīd-u'd-Dīn Ganj-i Shakkār to pray for his safe journey as the route was dangerous. The Shaikh, as narrated in *Fawa'id al-fuād* of Ḥasan Sijzi, told him that his jurisdiction ends at a certain spot where there was a pond and from there onwards begins the territory of Shaikh Baha'u'd-Dīn Zakariyya (*az ārijah tā ba Multān dar 'uhda-yi Shaikh Baha'u'd-Dīn ast*).² Another example that illustrates

1 Muhiyuddin Ibn al-ʿArabi. *Al-futūḥāt al-Makkīyya*, vol. 2, Cairo, 1911, pp. 277–78, cited in Buehler, Arthur E. 1998. *Sufi Heirs of the Prophet: The Indian Naqshbandiyya and the Rise of the Meditating Sufi Shaykh* University of South Carolina Press, p. xxiv.

2 *FF*, Majlis 16th, 9 Jamādiu'l awwal, 714/ 1314.

the spiritual jurisdictions of the Sufis comes from *Faṭḥu'l-awliyā'* and which is discussed by Carl Ernst in the context of Shaikh Nizāmu'd-Dīn Awliyā' assigning territories to his spiritual disciples.³ Burhānu'd-Dīn Gharīb, upon whom Nizāmu'd-Dīn Awliyā' conferred the spiritual domain of the Deccan, in turn bestowed the *wilāyat* of Mongipattam and Khandesh upon Ḥaẓrat 'Alā'u'd-Dīn Ẓiyā' (d. 801/1398–1399), the grandson of Bibi 'Āi'shā, supposedly the daughter of Shaikh Faridu'd-Dīn Ganj-i Shakkar, at the time of his birth.⁴ The anecdote of Ḥaẓrat 'Alā'u'd-Dīn Ẓiyā' is reminiscent of courtly tales in which the heir apparent was appointed while still in the breast-feeding stage. Thus, even the spiritual charisma, according to these anecdotes, had geographical frontiers, and the Sufi masters wielded the power of appointing their deputies.

Indeed, the terminologies common in describing the power structure of the above two institutions of worldly and spiritual authority—such as *darbār* (court of a king), *shāh* (emperor), *bādshāh* (king), *shāhīnshah* (king of kings), *gaddī* (seat/throne), and *gaddī-nishīnī* (occupying the seat/throne), and several other similar ones—are idioms of power and hierarchy and not of *faqr* (poverty) and *zuhd* (renunciation). Both systems were governed by normative texts which codified laws (*āḥkām*) and etiquettes and manners (*ādāb*) which closely guarded its members who were primarily males; women's presence was subject to the exigency of and approval by the male authority of the system. Hence, naming of the *silsilas* after the names of their male founders came in vogue. Thus, in the history of Sufism, there exists not one single *silsila* commemorating the name of a woman Sufi.

6.1 Women's Initiation (*Bai'at*)⁵

Taking or administering an oath of allegiance to a leader is an oral tradition in most tribal societies. However, since the beginning of the new community life in Madina, this oath of allegiance to the Prophet not only sanctified oath-taking but also expanded its meanings to include not just allegiance to a leader but to the new social order rooted in the concept of *tawḥīd* and *taqwā*. The women's oath of allegiance (*bai'at-i nisā'*) at al-Aqaba, which has emerged as

3 Carl W. Ernst. 1992. *Eternal Garden. Mysticism, History, and Politics at a South Asian Sufi Center*. New York: SUNY, pp. 235–36.

4 Rawnaq 'Alī. 1326/1908. *Rawẓatu'l-aqtāb al-m'arūf ba Mazhar-i Āṣāfi*. Aurangābād: Maṭba' Mu'in-i Daccan, p. 229.

5 I have opted for the spellings *bai'at* and not *bai'ah*, except in quotes, as *bai'at* is a familiar term in South Asia.

a “recurrent theme in the biographies of female Companions,”⁶ has inspired several shifting explanations, some even commenting that it reflects women’s lower position as compared to that of men. Although different views are given regarding the administering of the oath by the Prophet to women,⁷ the method of administering the oath to women is based on two sources: the Qurʾān (60:12) and the Ḥadīth. The Qurʾān says:

O Prophet! When believing women come to thee to take the oath of fealty to thee, that they will not associate in worship any other thing whatever with Allāh, that they will not steal, that they will not commit adultery (or fornication), that they will not kill their children, that they will not utter slander, intentionally forging falsehood, and that they will not disobey thee in any just matter,—then do thou receive their fealty, and pray to Allāh for the forgiveness (of their sins): for Allāh is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.⁸

The above verse (Sura al-Mumtahana, 60:12) refers to women’s oath of allegiance to the Prophet in Madina to become part of the Muslim community.⁹ As related by Ḥaẓrat ‘Ā’isha, the Prophet’s wife, when administering the oath of allegiance, the Prophet did not touch the hands of women. Ibn Ishāq also endorses this when he writes,

The Prophet never used to take the women’s hands [when they gave their oath of allegiance to him]; he did not touch a woman nor did one touch him except one whom God had made lawful to him or was one of his wives.¹⁰

6 Asma Sayeed. 2013. *Women and the transmission of religious knowledge in Islam*. New York: Cambridge University Press, p. 56–57.

7 For details, see Asma Asfaruddin. 2010. ‘Early women exemplars and the construction of gender space (re) defining feminine moral excellence.’ In *Harem Histories: Envisioning Places and Living Space*. Edited by Marilyn Booth. Durham: Duke University Press, pp. 23–48; also, Aisha Geissinger. 2015. *Gender and Muslim Constructions of Exegetical Authority: A Rereading of the Classical Genre of Qurʾān Commentary*. Leiden: Brill.

8 *The Holy Qurʾān, Text, Translation & Commentary* by Yusuf Ali. Lahore: Shaikh Muhammad Ashraf.

9 Barbara F Stowasser. 2005. ‘Women and Citizenship in the Qurʾān.’ In *Women and Islam: Critical Concepts in Sociology*. Edited by Haideh Moghissi. London [u. a.]: Routledge, pp. 180–94.

10 Ashraf Ali Thanawi and Yusuf Talal DeLorenzo. 2010. *A Sufi Study of Ḥadīth: Haqiqat al-Tariqa min as Sunna al-Aniqa*. London: Turath Publishing, p. 33; also, Quoted by Marion Holmes Katz. 2002. *Body of Text: The Emergence of the Sunni Law of Ritual Purity*. Albany:

Women, though viewed as a hurdle in a male Sufi's path, were still enrolled as disciples. Ziyā'u'd-Dīn Baranī (1285–1357), whose grave is next to that of Amīr Khusraw (1253–1325), describes how people of all descriptions and vocations came to Ghiyaspur, the hospice of the Shaikh Nizāmu'd-Dīn Awliyā' (1238–1325) in the suburbs of Delhi.¹¹ Barani refers to the special arrangements that were made to facilitate the travellers which included construction of raised platforms (*chabūtra*) with straw canopies (*chappar*), water wells for drinking and for ablution purposes, and even beddings for rest. Though Barani does not directly refer to women travellers here, the word *mardumān* (people) in this description indicates the inclusion of women. Women could come to his *khānqāh* even after sunset for taking the oath of allegiance. The discourse of the 20th Assembly held on 27 Jamādiu'l ākhir 708/1308 in *Fawa'idu'l-fu'ād* is a significant one, because on that evening a woman presented herself to seek an oath of allegiance (*bai'at*).¹² At this occasion, the Shaikh's comments on the numerous benefits that accrue from the virtues of women (*dar samara-yi ṣalāḥiyat-i 'aurat bisyār*) show not only that the Shaikh endorsed women's initiation but that he did not object to women taking the oath of allegiance and initiated them. Ḥasan Sijzi, the scribe, does not tell us whether other women were present at this Assembly or whether this woman arrived alone or was accompanied by male members of her family. The Shaikh commented that “dervishes who ask saintly women and saintly men to intercede on their behalf, remember saintly women first because they are so rare (*anikiḥ nek zanān gharīb bashand*)”—a recognition that women have and can attain saintly virtues. Then he added, “When a lion comes out [of the jungle], no one asks whether it is male or female. Thus, what matters is that the children of Adam, whether they be men or women, must be known for their devotion [to Allāh] and piety.”¹³ One wonders how different would have been my narrative if these words were put into practice and more women were initiated.

The practice of women becoming disciples (*murīd*) of the Chishtī *silsila* continued during the time of the second Chishtī Shaikh of Delhi, i.e., Shaikh Naṣīru'd-Dīn Maḥmūd Chirāgh-i Dihlī (d. 1356). Thus, a learned man (*dānish-mand*), who was one of the disciples of the Shaikh (*bandagān-i Ḥaẓrat Makhdūm*) and who taught Qur'ān to children, came from the village of Sahalī¹⁴

State University of New York Press, p. 247; also, see Ruth Roded. 1994. *Women in Islamic Biographical Collections*: pp. 24–25.

11 Ziyā Barani 1862. *Tārīkh-i Fīrūz Shāhī*. Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, p. 344.

12 FF, *Majlis* 20, 27 Jamādiu'l Ākhir, 708/1308.

13 FF, *Ibid*.

14 Later, one of the families of these disciples from Sahalī became the founders of the famous *madrasa* of Farangi Mahall of Lucknow.

to the Thirty-Second Assembly of the Shaikh and informed him that most people of his area, including women, were the Shaikh's *murīd* (*zanān ham-paiwand*). He also said that though men were mostly righteous (*ṣāliḥ*), women were more righteous than men were (*zanān-i ānjā ṣāliḥ tar and az mardān*). Hearing this, Ḥamid Qalandar, the scribe of *Khairu'l Majālis*, the Shaikh's *maḥfūz*, submitted that this virtue (of women) as being of high spirituality was due to the blessings of the Shaikh's discipleship.¹⁵ Unfortunately, we have no record to show either when or how many women were enrolled as disciples in the Chishtī *silsila* under Shaikh Naṣīru'd-Dīn Maḥmūd. What we do know is that a fairly large number of women were enrolled by the Shaikh. More important is that the topic of women's enrolment and their greater steadfastness as virtuous and devout persons was brought up and noticed in an all-male assembly. Neither the Shaikh nor anyone else present at the session objected to women's discipleship. On the contrary, women's virtues of being righteous (*ṣāliḥ*) were interpreted as an outcome of the blessings of their discipleship.

Later, in the narrative of the Fortieth Assembly of *Khairu'l Majālis*, which is devoted to the initiation of an anonymous woman followed by a brief exposition of *ba'at*, Ḥamid Qalandar records the rules of initiation for women, which is the first detailed account of a woman being initiated as a disciple of the Chishtī *silsila*.¹⁶ In this narrative, a woman could not present herself, but through a man (*ba-jihat-i kas rā*) requested Shaikh Naṣīru'd-Dīn Maḥmūd Chirāgh-i Dihlī to include her in his circle of *murīds*. This occasioned the exposition of Sufi perception of administering the oath of allegiance to women, even by proxy. The Shaikh asked someone to fetch a small earthen bowl filled with water (*kūzā-yi āb*). He recited some verse of the Qur'ān over it, which was not audible to those present there. He then dipped his finger of testimony (*angusht-i shāhādat*) into this water and asked the man to take the bowl to the woman who had requested initiation. He directed the man to convey to the woman that "after giving my salutations to her (*salām-i man*), tell her to immerse her index finger into this bowl of water, uttering these words, 'I have now submitted myself to such person (*man mutābi' falañ*).'" Then she should say her prayers, fast on the *ayyām-i bīd*, except during the days marked with exemption (*ayyām-i 'uzr*).¹⁷ She should also make a commitment of

15 *KM, Majlis* 32.

16 *KM, Majlis* 40; also, see section titled *ba'at nisā bā mashā'ikh and ṭarīqa ba'at zananān bā mashā'ikh* in Ruknu'd-Dīn Dabīr Kāshānī. *Shamā 'ilu' l atqiyā'* [Virtues of the devout], ed. Saiyyid 'Aṭā' Ḥusain. Hyderabad: Maṭbū' Ashraf Press, 1347/1929, pp. 48–49.

17 *ayyām-i bīd*, which means white days, are days when fasts are kept on the 13th, 14th, and 15th nights of each lunar month; *ayyām-i 'uzr* refers to the days of menstruation when a Muslim woman is exempted from keeping fasts during these days.

being gracious (*nīyāz*) to her servants and bondmaids (*ghulām wa kanizak*) and not maltreat or hurt them (*lat na kuni*). She should also be polite to her relatives and all others (*bā ahl wa bā hama*). Adding more to the subject, the Shaikh further elucidated that there were two types of *bai'at*: *bai'at-i Islam* and *bai'at-i irādat*.¹⁸ While in the first case, conditions for women neophytes are more than those for men; in the second one, these are the same for both men and women. The Shaikh, apparently was referring to women's pledge to the Prophet at Madina because next he recited *Sura al-Mumtahana* and narrated the Prophet's Tradition of administering the oath to women and explained that according to some, the Prophet used to cover his noble hand in his mantle from Yemen before shaking hands with women. He then added that some Traditions say that *Amīru'l mu'minīn* Ḥaẓrat 'Alī (ra) used to do the handshake on behalf of the Prophet.¹⁹ The Hadith or the narrator of the Tradition, however, was not identified by Shaikh Naṣīru'd-Din Maḥmūd. The Fortieth Assembly of *Khairu'l Majālis* is the first account of the ceremony of administering an oath of allegiance by a Shaikh to a woman. The ceremony was witnessed by all the male members present, who also assisted in the process by fetching the water bowl or by acting as a transmitter of the Shaikh's message to the woman concerned. This recorded incidence of an anonymous woman's oath of allegiance is a primary signifier in the understanding of the later history of women's initiation in the Sufi *silsilas* of South Asia.

The conditions of initiation by Shaikh Naṣīru'd-Din Maḥmūd Chirāgh-i Dihli consist of three sets of behaviour incumbent and mandatory for a woman novice: first, submission to the Shaikh; second, performance of the basic religious obligations; and third, respect for human dignity with no distinctions of cadre and status. Thus, the path that a neophyte had to follow was a path of humility and self-effacement and not of arrogance and snobbery. Next, not only was it necessary for the woman to remain anonymous but it was not considered essential to announce her name or unveil her identity either during the oath-taking ceremony or later on. Similarly, the man who played a key role in this episode of oath of allegiance is not only anonymous but his relationship with the woman concerned is not considered important. Shaikh Naṣīru'd-Din Maḥmūd did not even make it mandatory for the woman novice to present herself before the Shaikh even at a later time. Once the essentials

18 *Irādat*, an Arabic word with the literal meaning of desire or inclination, in Sufi *Adāb* (manuals) is a term for the intention to become a disciple of a Sufi Shaikh, the requirements of which are breaking all relations with other than God. See Nicholson, p. 199; also, *Hujwiri*, p. 245.

19 *KM*, *Majlis* 40.

of the ceremony were over, the bond of discipleship was tied and the woman joined the group of his *atbā* through the Blessed connection of following the Prophet. Finally, and most importantly, despite the obviously different method of administering the oath to a woman disciple, Shaikh Naṣīrū'd-Dīn Maḥmūd categorically declared that conditions for an oath of allegiance for a man and a woman are equal (*dar bai't irādat sharā'it-i mardān wa zanān masāwī ast*).

Contrary to Shaikh Naṣīrū'd-Dīn Maḥmūd Chirāgh-i Dihlī's practice of initiating women into his *silsila*, his disciple and *khalīfā*, Khwāja Gīsū Darāz (d. 825/1422) did not encourage this practice, though he did initiate women as his disciples and followed the same method as his Shaikh did.²⁰ If someone wants to be a soldier, he cannot evade the sword or bow and arrow, he argued, and for one who desires to be a scholar, there is no escape for him from the pen, inkpot, and paper. Thus, he emphasised that, similarly, "If a person wishes to be a Sufi, he then has to hold the skirt of a Sufi (*sufi kā daman pakrnā pa'eqā*)."²¹ His *khānqāh* in Gulbarga, Deccan, a well-maintained and well-funded Sufi establishment as compared to the austere *khānqāh*'s of his Chishtī mentor in Delhi, was visited by large number of devotees and supplicants of all faiths and social stature with gifts in cash and kind. The Shaikh was also of the view that, compared to his time, initiation into the Sufi *silsilas* was not frequent in earlier days. Also, if one became a follower of one particular Shaikh, he would be free to receive instructions from the other Sufis as well.²² These rules, however, were mostly for the males. Khwāja Gīsū Darāz, unlike his Chishtī mentors, was opposed to the initiation of women as disciples. Thus, among the various other things that the Khwāja highly disapproved of, one was that of anyone presenting a woman, a child, or a *murīd* of some other Sufi, before him for the purpose of seeking initiation and guidance. As noted by 'Abdu'l 'Azīz b. Sher Malik b. Muḥammad Wā'izī in his *Tarikh-i Ḥabībī wa Tazkira-yi Murshidī* which he completed in 849/1445,²³ that on such occasions, the Khwāja always used to comment, "I have always regretted (*nadāmat*) instructing these three types of people (*sih tā'ifā*). I have enough experience of them all." In the end, he argued, "there is nothing but displeasure (*takaddur*) and annoyance. I know

20 *Armughān-i Sulṭānī*, pp. 83–84.

21 *Sharah Jawāmi'u'l-kilām*, *Majlis* held on 28 *Rajab*, 802/March 25, 1400, p. 92.

22 *Ibid*, 7 *Shab'ān*, 802/ April 3, 1400, p. 114.

23 'Abdu'l 'Azīz b. Sher Malik b. Muḥammad Wā'izī, a scholar, was a disciple of Khwāja Gīsū Darāz's grandson and successor Yadu'llah Ḥusainī and completed the book while the latter was still alive. For reference to his little-known life and scholarly works, see Nazir Ahmad. 1973. "An old Persian Treatise of the Bahmani Period," in *Journal of the Indo-Iran Society*, 4 (4): pp. 11–34.

it too well that this matter is not free of suffering loss and damage (*khusrān*).²⁴ He did not explain what caused this annoyance and displeasure and what was this loss or damage. Gīsū Darāz's *malḡūz*, which his eldest son and *khalīfa*, Saiyyid Akbar Ḥusainī, began to compile in 802 H, and whose contents were approved by the Khwāja himself, provides further details of the causes of the Khwāja's displeasure and annoyance. Gīsū Darāz narrated an incident which probably happened in Delhi, that once he began giving *talqīn*²⁵ to an elderly, educated woman, a disciple of his Shaikh, Naṣīru'd-Dīn Maḥmūd Chirāgh-i Dihlī. The woman, however, instead of concentrating on the Divine, began enticing (‘*ishqbāzī*’) the Shaikh. Recalling this incident, the Shaikh said, “The Shaikhs were correct in saying that one should not instruct children and women. Also, one should not accept his own wife as his disciple.” Giving reasons for not accepting a wife as *murīd*, the Shaikh's argument sounds more a traditional hard-core misogynic argument than a pedagogical one. The Shaikh said that the mischief (*kharābī*) in making one's wife a *murīd* is that even if she is obedient and subservient (*muṭīʿ wa farmān-bardār*) to her husband, she cannot have the same respect and regard (*nisbat*) for her husband as a *murīd* has with his *pīr*. He admitted that he, however, did initiate his wife, but later felt abashed and regretted it (*pashīmān*). This experience proves (*tajriba*), he argued further, that whatever the great *Shaikhs* (*mashāʾikh-iʿuzzām*) have mandated, it is not without wisdom (*khālī az ḥikmat*) and that whoever contradicts (*khilāf-warzī*) these rules is humiliated.²⁶ One is left wondering what his wife did to him to cause him such great repentance and humiliation that he could not forget it even in the closing years of his life, after a marital life of more than forty years which produced a large number of children and grandchildren. Did he not remember the Qurʾān which says that married couples are like garments to each other (Surah 2:187) and they, in addition to sexual relationships, also protect each other as a vestment protects the body? Finding fault with his parda-observing wife's behaviour while depriving the audience of her side of the story sounds like accusation which does not fall in line with the humility and patience expected of a Sufi of Khwāja Gīsū Darāz's stature.

Despite Khwāja Gīsū Darāz's disapproval of initiating women, a large number of devotees, including women, visited his *khānqāh* each day and many of them sought his allegiance. For the initiation of women, he followed strict rules of segregation. If the woman was a veiled one (‘*aurat mastūra*’), a curtain

24 *Tārīkh-i Ḥabībī*, p. 112.

25 *Talqīn az-zikr*, the teaching of the formula of recollection of Allāh, is a foundational training of a novice Sufi.

26 *Sharah Jawāmiʿul-kilām*, Shʿabān 12, 802/April 8, 1400, p. 139.

(*chādar*) was drawn between him and the woman. In most such cases, he made sure that a *maḥram* of the woman was also present during the process. All those who came to seek allegiance had to place some offerings before the saint. The followers were instructed to bring dry fuel wood, rice and lentil, curd, salt, and money to cover the cost of free meals (*kandūri*).²⁷ Probably, women *murīds* were exempted from these offerings and payments, though it is not mentioned. The only difference between the performance of *bai'at* of a man and a woman novice, says the author of *Tārīkh-i Muḥammadi*, was of shaking hands and the use of scissors (*miqrāz*); both were not used for women and thus women's heads were not shaved. In addition, instead of placing a *kulāh* (hat), a scarf or a handkerchief was placed on a woman novice's head.²⁸

Once an initiation has taken place, a life-long bond is established between the Shaikh or *pīr* (meaning an old person and in this context the founder of a Sufi *silsila*) and the *murīd* (disciple) and lasts beyond the physical demise of the Shaikh. Once Khwāja Nizāmu'd-Dīn Awliyā' recalled how his spiritual mentor, Shaikh Farīdu'd-Dīn Ganj-i-Shakkar, while forgiving the Khwāja for his involuntary utterances which had displeased the Shaikh, commented that the Shaikh is the (bride) dresser of disciple (*pīr mashshaṭa-yi murīd ast*). In other words, the Shaikh polishes, chisels, and fashions a new person out of the person who originally came to him.²⁹ Thus, initiation in a Sufi *silsila* in simple terms is like enrolment in a learning institution which, in the case of Sufism, is embodied in an individual, i.e., the Sufi. The Master guides the disciple to the Real Path (*rāh-i-ḥaqq*) which finally results in his salvation and saves him from the punishment of hell fire (*'aḏāb-i dozakh*), as explained by Khwāja Gīsū Darāz.³⁰

Whereas initiation (*bay'a* or *bai'at*) of men in Sufi *silsilas* involved various ceremonies and rituals, performed in the presence of other members of the fraternity in the *khānqāh* of the Shaikh, the same was not practiced for women. How the Prophet's Tradition was practiced by the Sufis in South Asia and perhaps elsewhere is discussed below. The discourses on *bai'at* in the primary texts reflect the rules that were expounded by Shaikh 'Umar Suhrawardī (539/1145–632/1234) in his Arabic treatise on Sufi etiquettes *ʿAwārifu'l-ma'ārif* which continues to be widely read in South Asia. Even a cursory glance at these rules shows that Suhrawardī was setting the manual for men and not for

27 Shāh Muḥammad 'Alī Sāmānī. 1427 H, *Sīyar-i Muḥammadi* (*Sīyar-i Muḥammadiya tarjama al-ma'rūf*, *Tuhfah al-Aḥmadi* by Shāh Nazīr Aḥmad. Allahabad: Yūnānī Dawakhāna Press, 1928), pp. 74–84.

28 Ibid, p. 33.

29 FF, *Majlis* 25, 9 *Ramāzān*, 708 H.

30 *Sharah Jawāmi'u'l-kilām*, *Majlis* 27 *Ziqad*, 802/July 20, 1400, p. 463.

women. The most important *adāb* (etiquette) for the novice is to submit to the authority of the Shaikh, giving up all his choices in matters relating to his life. For most women, this would not have been practical in view of the dynamics of patriarchal society that curtails women's decision-making status. Next, the *murshid* and the *murīd* must hold their right hands. After the completion of the ceremony in which both declare their new teacher-disciple relationship, the disciple must kiss the right hand of the *murshid* and of the other saintly persons present there.³¹ Obviously, this was not meant for women.

As initiation into Sufism was largely viewed as a male prerogative, therefore all the Sufi manuals and discourses have a male audience in mind while explicating the practice of initiation of a novice. Shaikh Naṣīru'd-Dīn Maḥmūd, thus, laid down the first three basic rules for someone who seeks entry into the Sufi way, i.e., he should get his sleeves shortened, get the hem of his shirt shortened, and get his head shaved. The Shaikh argued that as under each hair there lives a Satan, therefore, shaving of the head means destroying Satan's house (*sar tarāshīda goyā khānā-yi shaitān kharāb kard*).³² Obviously, these rules were not for women.

There are instances showing male Sufi's preparedness not only to enrol women as their disciples but to adopt practices that were akin to women's ways of living. Shaikh 'Īsā Jundu'llah Sindhi of Burhanpur (962/1555–1031/1622) of the Shaṭṭārī *silsila* not only initiated a fairly good number of women as his disciples, but he is the only one credited for introducing a novel method of recognising and honouring women.³³ At the time of initiation, he used to give his women disciples, instead of the *kulha* or the hat, a scarf made of four yards of fabric. On this scarf, after *Bismillah* and the *Kalīmā-yi ṭayyaba*, the name of the woman disciple, her father's name, and the date of initiation were inscribed by Bābā Sattār (b. 983/1575), Shaikh 'Īsā's eldest son and successor. Shaikh 'Īsā respected and honoured women's practice of veiling and did not define it as a sign of their subordination or as a pretext for excluding them from the Sufi circles.³⁴

No one comes close to Shāh Kalīmu'llah Jahanābādī (d. 1142/1729), one of the last doyens of the Chishtī *silsila* in Delhi, in his earnest efforts to enrol

31 Suhrawardī, 'Umar b. Muḥammad al-Maḥmūd b. 'Alī al-Kāshānī, and Henry Wilberforce Clarke. 1891. *The 'Awārifu'l-ma'ārif, written in the thirteenth century*. Calcutta: Government of India Central Printing Office, pp. 160–164.

32 KM, *Majlis* 15.

33 For his biography, see Saiyyid Muḥammad Maṭī'u'llah Rāshid Burhanpurī. 1957. *Burhanpur ke Sindhi Awliyā'*. Haidrabad: Sindhi Adabi Board.

34 Ibid, pp. 99–100.

women as disciples.³⁵ Of his 123 letters addressed to his disciples, those written to his *khalīfā* in the Deccan, Shāh Nizāmu'd-Dīn Aurangābādī (d. 1142/1730) and which are aptly described by Nizami as the soul of all his letters,³⁶ talk about women's initiation as part of Shāh Kālīmu'llah's call for the Truth (*d'āwat-i ḥaqq*).³⁷ As these letters, in his words, were the rules of conduct (*dastūru'l 'amal*)³⁸ for his disciples, his insistence on initiating women of all ages and appearances—old or young, good looking or ugly—becomes a significant call for women's initiation. Under-age children should not be initiated, he warned, because at times it might be fatal to them in view of certain spiritual meditative exercises. To women the message of Truth (*Ḥaqq*), however, must reach without any delay and they should be instructed (*talqīn*).³⁹ In doing so, he warned Aurangābādī, all precautions must be taken. Women should be treated as *muḥarrimāt* (things prohibited)⁴⁰ and therefore long hours of privacy with young women must be avoided as this causes trouble for men (*kih mūjib-i fitnā mardum*). He also reminded that touching an unrelated woman is unlawful (*mas-i ajnabiya ḥarām ast*)⁴¹ and time spent with a woman in privacy causes ill-fame and brings one close to Satan.⁴² Shāh Kālīmu'llah Jahanābādī's continual emphasis on women's initiation, however, is not reflective of his soft attitude towards women. Women, he said, should be instructed (*'aurat rā talqīn bayad kard*) but at the same time one should seek protection from their deceit and avoid their trickery.⁴³ Ḥaẓrat Mazhar Jān-i Jānān followed almost a unique method of transmitting his spiritual attention (*tawjjuh*) to his female disciples. The wife of Ghulām Muṣṭafa Khan, one of his spiritual deputies who was also a friend of Shāh Walīullah Dihlawī, was also a *murīda* of Ḥaẓrat Mazhar. Instead of visiting him for instructions in his *khānqāh*, she used to sit daily at an appointed time in her own house to seek attention in absentia of the Master. A servant was sent to let the Shaikh know that she was in attendance. One day, a certain man, her employee, arrived and informed the Master that she was in

35 For a biography of Shāh Kālīmu'llah Jahanābādī, see Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, *Ḥaẓrat Shāh Kālīmu'llah Dihlawī*. Dehli: Maktaba Burhān (1946), pp. 20–22.

36 Ibid, p. 38.

37 Letter No. 21 in Shāh Kālīmu'llah Dihlawī.1315/1897. *Maktūbāt-i Kalīmī*. Dehli: Maktabā Muḥtabai', pp. 24–25.

38 Ibid, Letter No. 96, p. 73.

39 Ibid, Letter No. 35, p. 37; also, Letter No. 42, p. 41.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid, Letter No. 21, p. 25.

42 Ibid, Letter No. 44, p. 43.

43 Ibid, Letter No. 42, p. 41; the story is narrated by Mirzā Aḥmad Akhtar in his *Tazkira Awliyā'-yi hind (jild som)*. Dehli: Muir Press (n. d.), p. 119.

attendance, but Ḥaẓrat Mazhar at once knew that the man was not telling the truth and had come without his mistress's permission.⁴⁴

Shāh Waliullah Dihlawī (d. 1762), the eighteenth-century Sufi reformer of Delhi, in his *al Qawlu'l-jamīl* (written in Arabic in 1733), discussed various Sufi *silsilas* and the practices of initiation, emphasising that initiation was a *sunna* of the Prophet and therefore was not *wājib*.⁴⁵ Regarding women's *bai'at*, he wrote that instead of touching the Shaikh's hand, the woman should hold one end of a piece of cloth and the Shaikh, the other end. Perhaps to ward off several social evils that plagued the eighteenth-century South Asian Muslim community, Shāh Waliullah also suggested that only verbal *bai'at* was permissible for women.⁴⁶ This is not to suggest that he or his Sufi *silsila*, i.e., the *Naqshbandī-Mujaddidī silsila*, discouraged women's initiation. Referring to several disciples of his father, Shāh 'Abdur Raḥīm (d. 1719), a Naqshbandī Sufi, Shāh Waliullah, in a section titled *mashā'ikh-i Naqshbandīyya ke ashghāl* (mystical exercises of the Naqshbandī Masters), narrates an incredible story of one of his female disciples.⁴⁷ Sharīfa Khatūn, daughter of one Muḥammad Fāẓil, is recorded by Shāh Waliullah in *Anfāsu'l-Ārifīn* (Voices of the Gnostics). She excelled even male disciples in holding her breath and repeating *ism-i zāt* (reciting the name of the Essence, or Allāh) at least one thousand times or even more.⁴⁸ According to this anecdote, Sharīfa Khatūn was no ordinary disciple; despite her young age and her gender, she had absorbed the complete reflection of her Shaikh.⁴⁹

The stance of the Deoband School of scholars of Naqshbandī background in the late nineteenth century on *taṣawwuf* and *pīr-murīd* relationship emerged even more constricting in terms of women. The two founders of the Deoband Madrasa (founded in 1866), Muftī Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī (1829–1905) and Maulānā Muḥammad Qāsim Nānotwī (1833–1877), excelled and outnumbered other Muslim scholars in the issuance of *fatāwā* (sing. *fatwa*) and thus reached a wider audience in propagating their interpretation of Islam and its jurisprudence. Mufti Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī's *fatāwā* issued in response to questions asked by Muslims about women are few (the book does not recognize the

44 Shāh Ghulām 'Alī Dihlawī. 1309/1892. *Maqāmāt-i-Mazharī*. Dihli: Maṭba'-'i Mujtabā'ī, p. 57.

45 Shāh Waliullah Dihlawī, and Khurram 'Alī. 1970. *Shifā'al-'alīl: tarjuma-yi Qawl al-jamīl*. Lahore: Islami Academy, p. 22.

46 Ibid, p. 41.

47 For the life of Shāh 'Abdur Raḥīm, see *Anfāsu'l-Ārifīn* by his son, Shāh Waliullah Dihlawī (Delhi: Maṭba' Aḥmadi, 1315/1897).

48 *Shifā'al-'alīl*, p. 93. This mystical exercise is performed by repeating the name of Allāh while holding your breath.

49 See biographical notice on Sharīfa Khatūn in Part 2 of this book.

gender of the person seeking the *fatwa*, but it is assumed that all were males), but even these express a traditional patriarchal approach. For example, in response to two separate questions on women's *bai'at*, Gangohī declared that "in the opinion of the Sufi's (*ahl-i taṣawwuf*), women's *bai'at* is not permissible, albeit to instruct someone a *shughl* (inward engagement of a Sufi) or *wazīfa* (silent recitation of Qur'ānic verses)."⁵⁰ In support of his argument, he then quoted at some length from a letter of his sixteenth-century ancestor and spiritual mentor, 'Abdu'l Quddūs Gangohī (d. 1537).⁵¹ While Muftī Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī rigidly rejected women's initiation into the Sufi *silsilas* (though he did initiate women by proxy and after great persuasion), he continued treating women for their various ailments, including gynecological ailments, by giving medicines, particularly for easing labour pains.⁵² Paying tribute to his acumen in providing treatment to female patients with child-birthing difficulties, Gangohī's biographer, Meeruthī, records that in this process, Gangohī was not assisted by a *qāblā* (midwife) nor did he examine the *qārūra* (urine test tube) of the female patient. To avoid even a verbal contact with the female patient, he did not let her speak about her ailment. What he did was to feel the pulse of the patient, which meant touching their wrist with his fingers.⁵³ Meeruthī relates how on two occasions Gangohī, after initial hesitation, agreed to initiate two women, one a commoner and the other royalty. In the first case, while still a young man, a woman persisted in seeking *bai'at* at his hands which he initially refused. Finally, his spiritual mentor, Ḥājjī 'Imādādullah Makki (1817–1899), took him to the woman's house where, with a perspiring and blushing face, he bowed to the request of the woman and granted her *bai'at*.⁵⁴ The second is the case of the *bai'at* of Nawab Sultan Jahan Begum, the ruler of the Bhopal State. Before going for Ḥājj, Sultan Jahan Begum wanted to perform *bai'at* at the hands of Ḥājjī 'Imādādullah Muhājir Makki. However, before this could be done, he passed away. She then decided to approach his disciple, Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī, by sending him at least two letters. Gangohī agreed in

50 Maulānā Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī. *Fatāwā-yi-Rashīdiyya (Kamil) Fiqh Ḥanafī kā Anmol Khazīnāh*. Karachi: Dāru'l Ishā'at, n. d., p. 72, 79.

51 AA, pp. 215–17; Digby, Simon. 1975. 'Abd al-Quddus Gangohi (1456–1537): The personality and attitude of a medieval Indian Sufi,' in Khaliq Ahmad Nizami (Edited). *Medieval India: A Miscellany*. (pp. 1–66). London: Asia Publishing House.

52 Muḥammad 'Ashiq Ilāhī Meeruthī. 1344/1925. *Tazkirātūr Rashīd-ḥiṣṣā awwal*. Sadhora: Bilal Steam, p. 65.

53 Ibid, p. 66; Meeruthī, in another book, explains that it is permissible for a male physician to feel the pulse of a female patient according to Sharī'a. See *Tuḥfā-yi khwatīn*. Karachi: Maktaba Ma'arif al-Qur'ān (2009), p. 800.

54 *Tazkirātūr Rashīd-ḥiṣṣā awwal*, pp. 53–54; the letters were delivered by the Qāzī of the Bhopal State.

1323/1905, a few months before his own demise, to the Begum's written request and performed the *bai'at* by proxy.⁵⁵

Another Deobandi scholar, Maulānā Ashraf 'Alī Thanāwī (1864–1943) thought differently. Not only in his magnum opus work, the *Bihishti Zewar* (The Heavenly Ornament),⁵⁶ did he encourage little Muslim girls “to become a *maulawī*—that is, a scholar of Arabic,” but he also enumerated several benefits for women if they chose to become a *murīd*, as it is only through the *baraka* of a *pīr* that one follows the right path. However, an unmarried girl should take the oath with the permission of her parents and a married woman with the permission of her husband. He also warns that at the time of initiation ceremony, she must observe *parda* with the *pīr* and should never put her hand into that of the *pīr*. In case one gets to know that the *pīr* is not the right one, she must break her vow of allegiance immediately.⁵⁷

6.2 Arguments against Women's Presence in the Sufi *Silsilas*

A stronger trend with contradictory arguments, creating an ambivalence about women's position in Sufism, emerged with the spread and wider acceptance of reformist scholars, some of whom were informed by Naqshbandī Sufism. The Naqshbandis in South Asia, as elsewhere, have produced several voluminous works and small tracts on the Way of Sufi Masters. With the beginning of the twentieth century, a more conservative and vigorous public discourse regarding women's status within the context of their initiation into Sufi *silsilas* emerged. Surprisingly, these scholars, fed by Mujaddid Alf-i Sānī's tirade against women, in the heat of their arguments and led by their passion to keep women under restrictions, forgot about the charismatic Sufi woman, Ḥaẓrat Bibī Šāḥiba also known as Bibī Kalān (d. 1803) and a descendant of Mujaddid Alf-i Sānī, being the niece of Ḥaẓrat Šafīu'llah *Qayyūm-i Jahan* (1746–1798). Held along the controversial issue of women's segregation and observance of *parda*, these debates, while dichotomic in nature, open a new window to view male Sufi's perceptions of women. One such example is the *Mī'yār-us sulūk* (the standard of following the mystical path), published in 1927, of Muḥammad Ḥidāyat 'Alī Jaipurī (d. 1951), a Naqshbandī-Mujaddidi reformist-scholar and an educationist. This book, while presenting various aspects of the Naqshbandī-Mujaddidī *silsila* of the Sufis, was mainly written in the words of its author, Jaipurī, to dispel

55 *Tazkirātūr Rashīd-ḥiṣṣā dom*, pp. 103–4.

56 Maulānā Ashraf 'Alī Thanāwī. 1905. *Bihishti Zewar*. Lahore: Shaikh Ghulam Ali and Sons.

57 Ibid.

the “misleading views” of those Sufis who have not only strayed but led others to fall into the pit of depravity (*chāh-i gumrāhī*). Among such acts of innovation (*bidʿat*) is the initiation of women without honouring *parda* rules. These misguided persons, who claim to be the leaders (*rāhnuma*), do this under the pretext of being the fathers of their women disciples, warns the author. Jaipurī rejects and condemns this misguided behaviour of such fraudulent *pīrs*, commenting that *parda* observance for women is a Divine command (*farz*). To illustrate his statement, Jaipurī cites the example of the Prophet who took women’s oath of allegiance orally at the time of the conquest of Makkah.⁵⁸ *Pīrs* who do not observe *parda* rules in their contacts with their women disciples are in a situation of extreme risk and dread (*nihāyat khaṭreh aur andeshey*), warns Jaipurī. To strengthen his warning, he quotes a Ḥadīth of the Prophet without identifying its source, in which the Prophet, on seeing the mother of the Believers, Ḥaṣrat ‘Āisha, sitting alone with her father, Ḥaṣrat Abū Bakr Ṣiddiq, is said to have commented, “O Abū Bakr! Satan is not far away. Do not sit alone even with a daughter; on the contrary have a third person with you.”⁵⁹

Thus, setting the prelude to his next section, *baʿat karne aur tawajjuh dene ke mutaʿalliq* (Concerning taking the oath of allegiance and spiritual attention), Jaipurī explains the Naqshbandī-Mujaddidī stance on the question of women’s initiation into the Sufi *silsila* at the hands of male Sufis. Following are some of the major principles that Jaipurī listed for initiating women:⁶⁰

1. At the time of initiation, women should remain hidden away (in *parda*) and not be visible.
2. Women should repeat the same phrases as men do, the only difference being that neither a woman’s hand will be held (by the *pīr*) nor the *ism-i zāt* (the word Allāh) will be inscribed with the index finger (*angusht-i shāhadat*) on their chest (*qalb*). *Ism-i zāt* will be inscribed only with the power of imagination on the heart of a woman.
3. A woman’s verbal pledge will be sufficient.
4. If a woman’s blood relation (*maḥram*) is also a member of the *silsila*, he, then, should be made to sit between the *pīr* and the woman; in case he is not a member, the *pīr* should make the woman sit as far away as possible so that the words of *talqīn* (instructions) are not audible to her.
5. It is not permissible for an unrelated (*nā-maḥram*) woman to look at her *pīr*.

58 Shāh Muḥammad Hidāyat ‘Alī Jaipurī. 1926. *Mi’yārus sulūk wa dāfi’ al-auḥām wal-shakūk*. Kanpur: Maṭba‘-yi intizāmī, pp. 3–4.

59 Ibid, p. 164.

60 Ibid, pp. 167–168.

6. It is permissible to initiate a menstruating woman and a woman undergoing postpartum as the intent of initiation is doing repentance (*tawba*) and purification of the soul (*tazkiyā-yi nafs*).
7. Finally, assuming that a disciple is normally a man, Jaipuri instructs a *murid* "to keep his women veiled" from the *pīr*.⁶¹

Under the section *bayān namāz tahajjud* (account of midnight prayers), Jaipuri addresses men only to offer midnight obligatory prayers and makes another fallacious statement that women are weak in physique and intellect (*ẓa'if ul-jussa aur ẓa'if ul-'aql*) but are akin to manual workers, such as sweepers and washer men in doing their household chores, such as cooking and grinding corn. Displaying his contempt for women and their household work, he argues that if lowly persons such as women can get up far before dawn to do household chores for the happiness of their children and husbands, why can men not rise and offer the *tahajjud* prayers. Here, Jaipuri addresses not only men, but the crux of his argument is that obligatory prayers, such as *tahajjud*, are for men only.⁶² This statement, again, is highly erroneous and contradicts the spirit of the Qur'ān which does not classify acts of *'ibādat* in gendered terms.

It is worth remembering that Jaipuri's book came out at a time when South Asian Muslim male scholars passionately and vigorously advocated issues of women's seclusion, including restrictions on their mobility. Aḥmad Raza Khan Fāzil Barelwī (1856–1921), also addressed as *A'lā-ḥaẓrat* (His most exalted majesty) by his followers spread over the whole of South Asia and whose writings are believed to carry charismatic powers, wrote a treatise which was published around 1920. This treatise, *Jumal al-nūr fī nahī al-nisā' min ziyārat al-qubūr: al-m'arūf, Mazārāt par 'aurton kī ḥāẓirī* (women's shrine visitation) was written as an answer to a query by one Maulawī Ḥakīm 'Abdur Raḥīm from Gujarat, India, in 1339/1920 regarding permissibility of women's shrine visitation.⁶³ Advocating strict observance of women's segregation and women's subservience to the authority of their husbands, Aḥmad Raza Khan at the end of this forty-eight-page tract rejects the possibility of women holding any position in the hierarchy of Sufi *silsilas*. He strongly argued that "a woman cannot be *dā'ir ilal-Allāh* (one who calls people towards Allāh), albeit, there is no harm if she conveys the teachings of her *murshid* (spiritual master)." To support his argument, he then quotes a passage in Arabic with translation in Urdu from a sixteenth-century Egyptian scholar, 'Abd al-Wahāb al-Sha'rānī's work *Al-Mizān*

61 Ibid, p. 171.

62 Ibid, p. 176.

63 Aḥmad Raza Khan Fāzil Barelwī. *Jumal al-nūr fī nahī al-nisā' min ziyārat al-qubūr: al-m'arūf, mazārāt par 'aurton kī ḥāẓirī*. Lahore: Shabbir Brothers (n. d.).

al-kubrā al-Sha'rānīyah,⁶⁴ who said that only a man, and not a woman, can call people towards Allāh. He also said that there is no evidence in history that a woman has ever had the position of training the disciples because women are deficient in status. Indeed, a woman's uttermost quality is only that she should be *ʿābida* (devout and pious) and *zāhida* (abstinent) like Rābī'a al 'Adawīyya. Thus, Aḥmad Raḥa Khan Fāzil Barelwī rejects that women can be Sufi Masters (*murshid*).⁶⁵

The message of Aḥmad Raḥa Khan Fāzil Barelwī stands inscribed in the heart of his followers who surge like waves of the ocean around the world, thereby closing the gates to women.

6.3 Women as Sufis (*Awliyā' Allāh*)

It is important to note that discipleship of a Sufi is different from holding a position in the hierarchy of a Sufi *silsila*. Discipleship does not entail any public acknowledgement or a public signifier. Rather, it results in the adoption or interiorisation of a mode of pious living which gradually results in renunciation of all worldly attractions, including self-projection. In contradiction to this, holding positions within a Sufi *silsila* or being a member of a Sufi hierarchy and association with a Sufi hospice and *khānqāh* is a public expression of piety and devoutness. Thus, adherence and submission to piety is the essence of the pious way of life which is a definition of *taṣawwuf*, known to us by its more readily understood nomenclature, i.e., Sufism.

Recognition, identification, and acceptance of women as Sufis, however, does not come easily to men in general and to male Sufis in particular, even when they are guided, mentored, and counselled by women Sufis. Stories of Sufis who lived outside India and had several encounters with women were frequently told in India. In these stories, the names of highly revered male Sufis appear. Thus, in the *Tazkiratu'l Awliyā'* of Farīdu'd-Dīn 'Aṭṭār (d. 617/1220) of Nishapur, women who counselled wandering or travelling Sufis remain anonymous, and are mostly described as old, ugly, and dishevelled, as it is generally assumed that young and comely looking women excite passions in men of all ages and of all professions as women come from a lower soul.⁶⁶ Similarly,

64 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Sha'rānī (1493–1565) an Egyptian Shafī'i scholar and mystic, founder of an Egyptian *silsila* of Sufism which gradually declined after Sha'rānī's death, although it remained active until the 19th century.

65 *Jumal al-nūr fī nahī al-nisā'* pp. 47–48.

66 Rkia Cornell. 2007. "Soul of a Woman was Created Bow': Woman as the Lower Soul (*Nafs*) in Islam," in Grad D. Gort, Henry Jansen, & Hendrik M. Vroom (Editors). *The World Religions and Evil. Religious and philosophical Perspectives*. NY: Rodopi, pp. 257–280.

Bāyazīd Baṣṭāmī (d. 874),⁶⁷ one of the Sufis who was highly intoxicated with Divine love, and according to some was influenced in his mystical concept of *fanā* of Abū 'Alī Sindi (from lower Sindh),⁶⁸ acknowledged an old woman as his *murshid* who taught him the real lesson of eliminating one's ego but left her anonymous. Neither Baṣṭāmī nor 'Aṭṭār, nor any other source, mentions the name of this mentor of such a great Sufi who after his dialogue with the woman was so ashamed of himself that he felt that he had gone "from the highest high to the lowest low."⁶⁹ In another anecdote, Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 283/896), a Sufi-scholar who wrote a commentary of the Qur'ān⁷⁰ and who taught Ḥallāj (d. 309/922), in turn learned the basics of Sufism from an anonymous old, dishevelled-looking woman in two very unusual circumstances. First, he was embarrassed by this woman who rejected some money that he tried to give her in charity, but she in turn lifted her arm up and opened her fist to show what her palm was holding. She told him, "You take out money from your pocket; I get it from the Invisible." Next, arriving at the Ka'ba, he encountered her again. Seeing his surprise at beholding the Ka'ba circumambulating her, instead of her going around the House of Allāh, the old unnamed woman said, "Going around the Ka'ba is required for one who plans his journeys to the Ka'ba; the Ka'ba circumambulates the one who arrives here in a state of agitation."⁷¹

Discourse on male-female dichotomy surprisingly appears as an oft-repeated theme of the mystical sessions of the early Chishtīs. Khwāja Naṣīru'd-Dīn Chirāgh-i Dihlī believed that women have the potential to be friends of God, but not in the context of ordinary women. He even declared and followed equal rules for initiating women in his *silsila*. In his Eleventh Assembly, Shaikh Naṣīru'd-Dīn began a discourse on, among other matters, the *karāmāt-i Awliyā'* (charisma of the saints). Referring to *Surah al-Imrān* 3:37, the Shaikh narrated the story of Maryam *pārsā* (Maryam the chaste) and commented that she received food from Allāh because she was a friend of God (*Maryam walīyya būd*).⁷² However, public expression of ordinary women's piety was contested. Thus, for quantifying the spirituality of ordinary women, Shaikh Naṣīru'd-Dīn

67 For a biographical notice, see Faridu'd-Dīn 'Aṭṭār. 1997. *Tazkirat'ul-awliyā'* (Urdu translation). Lahore: al-Farūq Book Foundation.

68 Reynolds A. Nicholson. 1914. *The Mystics of Islam*. Sacramento Calif: Mautice Press (reprint, 2006), p. 12.

69 Faridu'd-Dīn 'Aṭṭār. 1997. *Tazkiratu'l-awliyā'* (Urdu translation), p. 106; Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār and Paul E. Losensky. 2009. *Farid ad-Din 'Attār's Memorial of God's Friends: Lives and Sayings of Sufis*. New York: Paulist Press, p. 208.

70 Sahl ibn 'Abd Allāh Tustarī, Annabel Keeler, and Ali Keeler. 2011. *Tafsīr al-Tustarī*. Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae.

71 Faridu'd-Dīn 'Aṭṭār. 1997. *Tazkiratu'l-awliyā'* (Urdu translation). Lahore: al-Farūq Book Foundation, p. 170.

72 KM, *Majlis* 11.

applied a different scale. In one of his discourse sessions, he eloquently distinguished between the merits of prayers offered by a widowed woman and those offered by a male seeker for Divine Grace. Addressing Maulānā Hissāmu'd-Dīn Multāni (671/1272–753/1352),⁷³ Shaikh Naṣīru'd-Dīn went to the extent of distinguishing between prayers offered by a woman and by a man to seek Allāh's proximity. He said if a person fasts each day and prays each night (*agar kasi roz ṣā'im bāshad wa shab qā'im*), there is nothing great in it, because any widow (*īn miqdār har bewa zan*) can do this much prayer and fasting. Thus, what makes a person attain proximity to the Divine is not prayer and fasting; the concentration (*mashgūlī*) that the men of Allāh (*bandagān-i khuda*) need to seek Allāh's proximity is of a different order (*juz īn mashghūlī ast*).⁷⁴ The Shaikh, who was a scholar of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and had "intimate knowledge of the Qur'ān,"⁷⁵ most probably was not excluding women from *bandagān-i khudā*. Here, thus, the reference is to Sufi men who act as mentors for other men.

Interestingly, Shaikh Naṣīru'd-Dīn's successor, Khwāja Gīsū Darāz (d. 825/1422), propagated a disparaging perception of women. Instead of selecting only a discourse session, he is the first of the Chishtīs to choose the medium of communication through writing letters to friends and disciples. Thus, in one such letter, addressed to Shaikhzāda Khwāja Ṣadru'd-Dīn Khwand Mīr⁷⁶ and his brothers, demeaning women's spirituality and submission to the Divine, he wrote that prayers (*namāz guzārdan*), keeping fasts (*rozā dāshtan*), and doing munificent acts and good deeds (*ḥasanāt wa mabarrāt*) and other similar acts can be performed by a widow; remembrance of the seekers of the Divine is something different (*mashghūlī ṭālibān-i khudā kār-i alā-ḥida bāshad*).⁷⁷ In the closing sentences of the same letter, referring to the mother of Khwand Mīr and sending prayers (*du'ā*) for her, and perhaps indirectly appreciating her virtuous acts, he further expressed his bias against women. He wrote that "a woman who performs manly deeds (*'aurat kih kār-i mardān*) is indeed a man in the form of a woman (*o mard ast bar šūrat-i 'aurat*); if a man acts as a woman

73 Maulānā Hissāmu'd-Dīn Multāni was one of the *khalīfas* of Shaikh Nizāmu'd-Dīn Awliyā' who deputed him to Gujarat where the Maulānā passed away at Patan. See AA, pp. 87–89.

74 KM, *Majlis* 17.

75 Khaliq Ahmad Nizami in his introduction to *Khair-u'l-majālis: Conversations of Shaikh Nasir-u'd-din Chiragh of Delhi* [ob. 1356] compiled by Hamid Qalandar, p. 9, 10.

76 Shaikh Ṣadru'd-Dīn Khwand Mīr belonged to the family of scholars. His grandfather and father held the office of Shaikhul' Islam of Irichpur. Ṣadru'd-Dīn became a disciple of Khwāja Gīsū Darāz in 810 and later was appointed as one of his *khalīfas*. See *Siyar-i Muḥammadī*, pp. 133–34.

77 Letter no. 22 (undated) to Shaikhzāda Khwand Mīr in Khwāja Ṣadru'd-Dīn Abu'l Fath Saiyyid Muḥammad Gīsū Darāz Chishtī and Saiyyid 'Ata' Ḥussain (Edited) *Maktūbāt Imāmu'l 'Arifīn Saiyyid Muḥammad Gīsū Darāz*. Hyderabad: Barqī Press. 1362 (1943), p. 48.

does, that man is sensual (*hawa parast*), he is a woman in the form of a man, indeed worse than her (*balki bad-tar az ān*).⁷⁸ These views were so deeply and strongly embedded in the Shaikh's psyche that once again, in another letter, he repeated the same ideas in the same words.⁷⁹

6.4 Women as *Khalīfas*

The question of women's position as spiritual deputies or successors (*khalīfas*) of male Sufi Shaikhs is highly debated, causing serious rifts among Sufi Shaikhs and religious scholars. This rift is rooted in the concept of authority and power. Historically, the image of a *khalīfa* is of a male Sufi, wielding spiritual authority with a potential to influence the temporal authority of the rulers. A Sufi *khalīfa*, thus, plays a dual role and function. Spiritual succession is an issue of Sufism, with its hierarchical power structure created and nourished by the rules of Sufi *silsilas*. In the early Sufi sources of South Asia, when the issue of the legitimacy of pious women's spiritual succession first surfaced, it was discussed not as an issue of *khilāfat* only.⁸⁰ It was jointly presented as a double issue of *khilāfat wa sajjāda-yi Mashāi'kh*. *Sajjāda* is a place where the forehead touches the ground in offering prayers or in thanksgiving. This place could be a prayer rug, a mosque, a house, or any other appropriate location. In South Asia, *sajjāda*, when used to denote earthly obedience and power, is also called *gaddi* (literally meaning a throne or seat of authority), and thus, *sajjāda-nishīn* are also referred to as *gaddī-nishīn*.⁸¹ The following section analyses this issue in light of Sufi discourses. This significant issue of spiritual succession of women Sufis, however, remains relatively underreported in contemporary hagiographical texts. It is also ignored by modern scholars, who have interpreted it in the context of male contestants only.⁸²

78 Ibid, p. 48.

79 Ibid, letter no. 65 to Amīr Chanda, p. 123.

80 *Khilāfat*, an Arabic word, is used both as a noun and as a verb. It represents the function of the power of the *khalīfa* and is also used for the office of *khalīfa*.

81 Rifts and litigations over *sajjāda* and *gaddī-nishīnī*, mainly among male contestants, has a prolonged history, often ugly. The British colonialists of India codified laws about the handling of the large shrine endowments. Some of these laws are based on oral traditions. See W.H. Macnaghten and William Sloan. 1882. *Principles and precedents of Moohummudan law, relative to the doctrine of inheritance, contracts and miscellaneous subjects*. Madras: Higginbotham. (First published in 1825, Calcutta).

82 See for instance, Simon Digby. 2003. "The Sufi Shaikh as A Source of Authority in Medieval India." In *India's Islamic Traditions* 711–1750. Edited by Richard M. Eaton, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2003, pp. 237–41; Tanvir Anjum, 'Sons of Bread and Sons of Soul'

In general, male opinion remained hostile to the idea of women holding the position of a spiritual successor. However, it did not begin on a note of rejection. Surprisingly, and in contradiction to the later development, the historical growth of the institution of spiritual succession began in a positive light with the example of Bibī Ḥāfiz Jamāl, the daughter of Khwāja Muʿinuʿd-Dīn Chishtī Ajmeri (d. 633/1236) and his wife, a daughter of a local Hindu chieftain of Rajput ancestry. *Jawāhir-i Farīdī*, a hagiographical *tazkira* of Sufi biographies completed in 1623, says that Bibī Ḥāfiz Jamāl was given the cloak of Sufi Shaikh on 11 Rabiʿuʿl ākhir 599, after *ʿisha* prayers by her father, Khwāja Muʿinuʿd-Dīn Chishtī Ajmeri.⁸³ Later, *Risāla Siyaruʿl Aqtāb* (1646), referring to the charisma (*karāmat*) of Bibī Ḥāfiz Jamāl, also confirmed that among his at least eighteen spiritual successors, Khwāja Ajmeri also included the name of Bibī Ḥāfiz Jamāl.⁸⁴

The practice of recognising women as spiritual deputies, however, soon lost approval. It has resurfaced, with some limitations, in the recent past. Before the thirteenth century could come to its end, Muslim women of South Asia were disqualified to hold the office of a spiritual deputy because they were women. The first Sufi Master to negate this was none other than one of the disciples of Khwāja Ajmeri, Shaikh Farīduʿd-Dīn Ganj-i Shakkar (1175–1265). When the question of naming Bibī Sharīfa, his exceptionally worthy second daughter who had inherent attributes of a friend of Allāh, as his successor was considered, the Shaikh commented,

Had it been permitted to give the authorization for succession [of the Sufi Shaikh] and the permission to sit on the rug of prayer [seat of the Shaikh] to a woman, I would have given it to Bibī Sharīfa (*agar ʿaurat rā khilāfat wa sajjāda-yi Mashāʾikh dādan rawā būd man Bibī Sharīfa rā mī-dādam*).⁸⁵

These words of Shaikh Farīduʿd-Dīn, though few in number, carried immeasurable weight in tilting the scale in favour of men. Since the thirteenth century, these words have acquired the status of a sacred dictum and have served as a preamble to misogynist rationalisation of depriving women of roles as spiritual deputies (*sajjāda-nishīn*). The above brief reference of Kirmānī in *Siyaruʿl Awliyāʾ*, like most other accounts about women Sufis, is abruptly cut short.

Lineal and Spiritual Descendants of Baba Farid and the Issue of Succession.' In *Sufism in Punjab: mystics, literature and shrines*. Edited by Surinder Singh and Ishwar Dayal Gaur. 2009. Delhi: Aakar Books, 2009, pp. 63–79.

83 *Fihrist Kitāb Jawāhir-i Farīdī*, p. 162.

84 *Risāla Siyaruʿl Aqtāb*, p. 127.

85 SA p. 191.

We do not know when and by whom this suggestion was first made. Does it reflect a process of inner thoughts of Shaikh Farīdu'd-Dīn expressing his inability, under the weight of antiwomen traditions, to take what he thought was the best course of action? Or was this rejection based on his understanding of the Qur'ān? The use of the word *rawā* could be a significant key for further exploration of the root of his concerns. *Rawā* ordinarily is not a term of reference for the laws derived from the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth. It is associated more with the practices that get further approval by the process of repetition. Further, the words, as quoted by Kirmānī, do not convey a determined, well-considered stand of Shaikh Farīdu'd-Dīn. The presence of the word *agar* (if) in this reference, indicates further his willingness rather than his rejection. In addition to the above, it appears as if the question of Bibī Sharīfa's succession was already an issue discussed at the Ajodhan *Jamā'at-khāna*. Probably Shaikh Farīdu'd-Dīn's statement was in response to this discussion. If this were the case, it means that a woman's spiritual succession was discussed among Sufi men with faith in *taṣawwuf*. This possibility encourages me to consider Shaikh Farīdu'd-Dīn's disapproval as his effort to alleviate a rift among his disciples. The last point carries more weight in view of the activities of Shaikh Farīdu'd-Dīn's son, who was desperate to get hold of the *Jamā'at-khāna* and turn it into a source of income. We can infer from Kirmānī that the statement was most probably made during the closing days of the Shaikh when he was almost in a state of being besieged by his world-wise sons. It is significant to note here that Shaikh Farīdu'd-Dīn passed away without appointing any of his sons either as his *khalīfa* or *gaddī-nishīn*. His statement about Bibī Sharīfa, however, continues to resonate as a declaration against women's spiritual succession.

As exceptions are part of human experiences, there are occasional and rare incidents of women receiving *khilāfa* recorded in Sufi texts. One such earlier example is the case of the succession of Khwāja Gīsū Darāz in *Siyar-i Muḥammadi*, which was later included in *Tārīkh-i Ḥabībī*. Khwāja Gīsū Darāz once narrated that at the passing away of his mentor, Shaikh Naṣīru'd-Dīn Chirāgh-i Dihlī, his *wilāyat* was divided among four of his disciples, namely, Khwāja Gīsū Darāz, a potter (*kulāl*), a chest carver (*ṣandūq tarāsh*), and a woman. Subsequent to the demise of each of the last three mentioned, their share was also given from "that side," i.e., '*ālam-i bālā* (the world above—Heaven) to the Khwāja.⁸⁶ The anecdote, not found in any other contemporary Sufi text, is a surprising one in view of Shaikh Naṣīru'd-Dīn's estimation of what

86 *Siyar-i Muḥammadi*, p. 21; *Tārīkh-i Ḥabībī*, p. 22; *Armughān-i Sulṭānī al-ma'rūf sair-i Gulbarga*, p. 42.

he argued was women's inherent nature—lack of intelligence and their subsequent deficiency in their understanding of the faith.

Saiyyid Muḥammad Ashraf Jahāngīr Simnānī (d. 1437),⁸⁷ a well-read and widely travelled Sufi émigré from Central Asia, having links with several Sufi traditions and a firm believer in *hamā ast* (all is He), arrived in India and finally settled in Kichauccha Sharīf (in the District of Amedakar, Uttar Pradesh, India). A contemporary of Khwāja Gīsū Darāz, whom he also visited and spent considerable time at his *khānqah* in Gulbarga, Simnānī reflects Gīsū Darāz's stringent disapproval of women's role as Sufi guides. In his *malfūzāt*, compiled by his disciple, Nizāmu'd-Dīn Yamanī, he acknowledges that the amount (*miqdār*) of knowledge and Truths (*ḥaqā'iq wa ma'ārīf*) he gained from Khwāja Gīsū Darāz was far greater than one could get from any other Shaikh.⁸⁸ These *malfūzāt*, among various other themes, also discuss *pir-murid* relationship and the status that women should or should not hold within the Sufi hierarchy. Simnānī extolled women such as Rābi'a al-Basri and Fāṭima, wife of Sultan Aḥmad b. Khizrawayah (d. 240/854–855) for their virtues and striving in the path of Allāh (*faẓā'il wa mujāhidāt*). He even acknowledged that some women had also attained the status of *abdāls*. Despite all these acknowledgements and references, Simnānī remained fixed in his argument that whatever high status women might have had and that to some even Allāh bestowed such great spiritual knowledge that even men of the path of Sufism needed their help (*muḥtāj*), and some even excelled men (*manzilat īshān ziyadah az b'āz rijāl ast*), still none of them could train disciples (*tarbiyat-i muridān*) because of the limitations of veiling and concealment. As this veiling and concealment prohibits women from participating in public functions, particularly in their role as leaders, therefore, for the same reason women were not bestowed the status of prophethood (*nabūwat*), argued Simnānī.⁸⁹ Simnānī's arguments against women's status in Sufi hierarchy might appear incredible to a modern audience, but these views represent the most extensively held discourse about women which continues even today.

The most eloquent disavowal of women as Sufis, however, came from 'Alī'u'd-Dīn 'Alī bin 'Abdu'l-Malik Ḥusāmu'd-Dīn al-Muṭṭaqī al-Hindī (885/1480–975/1567) a scholar born in Burhanpur and who migrated to Makkah and died

87 For his life account, see AA, pp. 60–61; also, *Azkār-i Abrār*, p. 145; Rizvi, *History of Sufism*, Vol. 1, pp. 259–60, 266–70.

88 Ashraf Jahāngīr Simnānī. 1499/1999. *Laṭā'if-i Ashrafi fī bayān-i ṭawā'if-i Šūfi*. (vol. 1). Karachi: Ḥalqa-yi Ashrafiya, p. 367.

89 Ibid, pp. 330–31.

there.⁹⁰ Shaikh 'Alī Muṭṭaqī was a Sufi and a scholar of Ḥadīth, with disciples in the Arab world and in India. An ascetic in its true sense, Shaikh 'Alī Muṭṭaqī earned his living by copying rare manuscripts. He also wrote more than one hundred books. His *Kanzu'l 'Ummāl*, an encyclopaedia of Ḥadīth, is still used as a reference source. Of these hundred books, one is *al-unwān fi sulūku'n-niswān* (a preface to the conduct of women), which is a small tract written in Arabic.⁹¹ Arguing that women were created for the benefit of men and for the purpose of continuity of the process of reproduction,⁹² Shaikh 'Alī Muṭṭaqī examines the question whether women have the merit to attain *walāyā*. Reiterating the misogynist viewpoint that women are created as deficient in intellect and in the understanding of faith, Shaikh 'Alī Muṭṭaqī argues further that *walāyā* is not decreed for women because all the matters related to women, including their bodies and their voices, have to remain veiled and covered (*satr wa ikhfā*).⁹³ It is worth mentioning here that Shaikh 'Alī Muṭṭaqī was not against women; he supported and patronised the widows with generous cash gifts.⁹⁴

This tract, *al-unwān fi sulūku'n-niswān*, at some point was also translated into Persian and was in circulation in India. The Persian tract was translated into Urdu under a new title, *Hidāyatu'n niswān* (Guidance for women), with some additions and corrections, and was published in 1871, with a second printing in 1872.⁹⁵ Before examining the contents of this Urdu translation, it is interesting to recap briefly how and why this book was translated into Urdu. According to the translator, Maulawī 'Alī Muḥammad ibn-i Muḥammad Mu'īn, in 1871 a group of Muslim scholars well-versed in *fiqh* and Ḥadīth, including himself, Nawwāb 'Abdu'l Bāsiṭ Khan, and Munshi Zahīru'd-Dīn, assembled in Lucknow at the house of an elite of the city, Nawwāb Fidā Ḥasan Khan. The friendly talks moved to the topic of women's status and whether women could acquire the status of a Sufi. After much discussion, the conclusion was drawn that because of their flawed intelligence (*nuqṣān-i 'aql*) and ignoble ways (*zamā'im ādāt*),

90 For a biographical notice of Shaikh 'Alī Muṭṭaqī, see Ghulām 'Alī Āzād Bilgrāmī. 1328/1910. *Daftar-i awwal Ma'āsiru'l kirām*. Agra: Maṭba' Mufid-i 'Ām, pp. 192–94.

91 'Alī ibn 'Abd al-Malik Muṭṭaqī. (Edited by Majdi al-Saiyyid Ibrahim). 1992. *al-unwān fi sulūk an niswān*. Qahirah: Maktabat al-Qur'an. A micro-filmed copy of the actual manuscript, no. MF33941, which is thirty paged, and was copied by Aḥmad al-Masirī on 23 Muḥarram, 1107/September 3, 1695, is in the Miṣr Library, Cairo, Egypt. In 1992, Majdi al-Saiyyid Ibrahim edited it and published it (Qahirah: Maktabat al-Qur'an). All my references are from Majdi al-Saiyyid Ibrahim's edited work.

92 Ibid, p. 27.

93 Ibid, pp. 24–25.

94 Saiyyid Athar Abbas Rizvi. 2004. *A History of Sufism in India*, vol. 2, pp. 319–27.

95 Maulawī 'Alī Muḥammad ibn-i Muḥammad Mu'īn. 1872. *Hidāyatu'n niswān*. Lucknow: Fakhru'l Maṭab'.

women are deprived of these higher stations.⁹⁶ At this, Munshi Zahiru'd-Dīn suggested that Shaikh 'Alī Muṭṭaqī's book, *al-unwān fī sulūku'n-niswān*, a copy of which was in his library, was the best and the most authoritative source on this subject. It was then decided that to propagate this work, it must be translated into Urdu. The translated version was expanded and more faults of women were added; extracts from other sources were included to show the merits of wives' submission to their husbands in seeking entry into Heaven. The book sold out and a second printing came out the following year.⁹⁷ Perhaps the financial gains of the book encouraged the Munshi Nawal Kishore Press to print it again. In 1881, a third edition was edited by Maulawī 'Alī Muḥammad's son, Maulawī Muḥammad Ibrāhīm, for the benefit of the Muslims.⁹⁸ The new edition of the book declared that the above details, from the sixteenth century to the late nineteenth century, covering vast geographies from India to the Arab world, are presented here to show the persistence of male rejection of women to attain *walāya*.

Contrary to the views of 'Alī Muṭṭaqī, his near contemporary, 'Abdu'l Quddūs Gangohī (d. 944/1537) made significant contributions to the recognition of women's merits as spiritual guides. An accomplished theologian, Gangohī emerged more as a well-recognised Sufi as the number of his disciples grew.⁹⁹ To propagate his views, Gangohī maintained a hot line of correspondence and addressed about two hundred letters to rulers, elite, disciples, and relatives on a variety of themes—themes of Allāh's worship and following the Tradition of the Prophet dominated his letters. Of these letters, one remains unique. Letter number 66 is the only one addressed to a woman, one Bibī Islām Khātūn, daughter of 'Umar Khan Sarwāni, a powerful political-military ally of the Lodi Sultans. The theme of this letter was *dar bayān 'adam jawāz khilāfat bara' ye zanān har chih bākamāl mardān rasad* (an explanation of nonexistence of

96 Ibid, p. 2.

97 Maulawī 'Alī Muḥammad ibn-i Muḥammad Mu'īn. 1872. *Hidāyatu'n-niswān*. Lucknow: Fakhru'l Maṭab'.

98 Maulawī 'Alī Muḥammad (*marḥūm*). 1881. *Hidāyatu'n-niswān*. Munshi Nawal Kishore (place not given).

99 For a short biography of Gangohī, see Khwāja Muḥammad Hāshim Kishmī. 1890. *Zubdat al-muqāmāt*. Kānpūr: Maṭba' Munshī Nawal Kishore (Urdu translation by Ghulam Mustafa Khan and Maulānā Abul Fath Saghiruddin. Maṭba' Nu'māniya, Sialkot, 1407/1987), pp. 148–55; 'Ijāzu'l Ḥaqq Quddūsī. 1961. *Ḥaẓrat 'Abdu'l Ḥaqq-Quddūs Gangohī ḥayat aur unkī t'ālīmāt*. Karachi: Educational Press; Simon Digby. 1975. "'Abd al Quddus Gangohi (1456–1537): The personality and attitude of a medieval Indian Sufi," in Khaliq Ahmad Nizami (Edited). *Medieval India: a miscellany*. (pp. 1–66). (London: Asia Publishing House, 1975).

justification for women's *khilāfat*, albeit they might have reached excellence of men). Gangohī affirmed the spiritual merits of Bibī Islām Khātūn and recognised that she was equal to men in her virtues. He also lauded her courage to step into what he called the men's world. The patched frock of the Sufis (*khirqā-yi mashā'iq*), however, was declined to her by Gangohī because *khilāfat* is not lawful (*majāz nāshud*) for women.¹⁰⁰ Also, the authority to make *bai'āt* was not given to her because of this. Thus, the thirteenth-century argument of Shaikh Farīdu'd-Dīn Ganj-i Shakkar when he rejected his daughter as his successor remained vibrant and strong. Displaying some softening of the rigidity against women's position, however, Gangohī adopted a rather pliant attitude and permitted Bibī Islām Khātūn to confer the hat (*kulāh*) and the frock (*dāman*) on his behalf (*bā wikālat pīr-i khud*) to men and women who came to her and sought her spiritual blessings. She was allowed to confer the frock to women who could be present or absent, but a hat to men only in absentia. Bibī Islām Khātūn was also permitted to give them the genealogical table (*shajra*) of her *silsila*, i.e., the Mujaddidī-Naqshbandī *silsila*, and enrol them as disciples (*murīd*) of her Shaikh, 'Abdu'l Quddūs Gangohī.¹⁰¹ Neither of the two sources, which include the above letter, provide any information about whether Bibī Islām Khātūn put this significant letter into practice or not.

After a lapse of several centuries, in the late eighteenth century, three striking examples of women appointed as *khalīfas* emerge. Interestingly, all three have connections with Delhi and with the Naqshbandī-Mujaddidī *silsila* of the Sufis. Several factors can be identified for this positive stand of male Sufi masters who still held the final authority of conferring and granting permission (*ijāzat-nāma*) to these three women to teach. Probably the new awareness for recognising women's worth was related to some extent to the political and economic stress experienced by the Muslim community in the wake of the loss of political authority and to the emerging social chaos that became rampant throughout the subcontinent of India.

Of these three path-breaking examples, two women Sufis, Ḥaẓrat 'Ajība Khānam of Panīpat and Ḥaẓrat Mardum Maḥall (d. 1801), were disciples of Mirzā Mazhar Jān-i-Jānān (d. 1781) of the Naqshbandī-Mujaddidī *silsila* of the Sufis. Both were given letters of authorization to teach and enrol women

100 See Part 2 for Bibī Islām Khātūn's biographical notice.

101 Maulānā Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī. *Fatāwa-i-Rashīdiyya (Kamīl) Fiqh Ḥanafī kā Anmol Khazīna*. Karachi: Dāru'l Ishā'at, n. d., p. 72. The same letter, with little variation, is translated in Urdu in *Majmū'a' khuṭūṭ- Maktūbāt Quddūsia Qutb-i 'Ālam Ḥaẓrat Shaikh 'Abdu'l Quddūs Gangohī*. Compiled and translated by Wāḥid Bakhsh Sayāl, Lahore: al-Faisal (2010), p. 229.

disciples.¹⁰² The third woman Sufi was Ḥaẓrat Bibī Ṣāḥiba (d. 1803) whose influence spread far and wide.¹⁰³ Ḥaẓrat Ṣafīu'llah, *Qayyūm-i Jahan* (1746–1798) of the Mujaddidi *silsila* conferred upon her the *irshād nāma* and appointed her as one of his twenty-eight deputies.¹⁰⁴

102 For details, see their biographical notices in Part 2 in this book.

103 For notice on her life, see Part 2 in this book.

104 For the list of deputies, which also included Bibī Ṣāḥiba's two sons, see Muḥammad Faẓlu'llah. 1355/1936. *Umdat'l Maqāmāt*. Lahore: Litho Expert Press, pp. 490–95.

Sufi Women of South Asia

Veiled Friends of God

By

Tahera Aftab



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