Lives of Sufi Saints

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The Life of Sayyid Muhammad ibn Ja'far al-Makki

The concept of sainthood in Islamic history may be considered one of the fundamental religious categories that has guided the development and structure of Islamic society. Hagiography, the writing of lives of the saints, has accordingly been one of the most prominent forms of Islamic religious literature. The hagiographer chooses exemplary figures from among the “friends of God” (awliyā’, pl. of wali), and the resulting portrait is designed to mirror for the faithful the qualities of the perfect human being. Sainthood is one of the basic principles of Sufism, the mystical tradition of Islam, and lives of the saints were first written down in large collections in Arabic at the end of the tenth century C.E., when the Sufi movement had become highly visible in Islamic society in the Arab countries and Iran. In India, large biographical dictionaries of saints began to be written in Persian in the late sixteenth century, under the patronage of the Mughul emperors. The selection that follows is from one of the best of these hagiographies, Notices of the Noblest Concerning the Secrets of the Sanctified, by ‘Abd al-Haqq Muhaddith Dihlawi (“Servant of the Real, the Traditionalist, from Delhi,” d. 1642). It concerns a Sufi saint from the fifteenth century, Sayyid Muhammad ibn Ja’far al-Makki (“Descendant of the Prophet, the Praised, Son of River, from Mecca”). After providing brief notes regarding the training, writings, and life of his subject, ‘Abd al-Haqq gives extensive excerpts from al-Makki’s letters to a friend, which had been written in 1421 and collected under the title The Sea of Meanings. These excerpts elucidate two main topics: the nature of sainthood and mystical experience.

Traditions going back to hadith reports from the Prophet Muhammad affirm that there is a special class of servants of God, usually numbered as 356 (but here counted as 357), upon whom the maintenance of the world rests, though they remain unknown to the world. These include the “substitutes” (abdāl), the “trees” (awtād), the “solitaries” (afraḍ), and the supreme figure of the hierarchy, the “axis” of the world (qub). Al-Makki not only describes these figures, but claims to have
met them personally in his mystical experiences (it is noteworthy that his biographer seems to take these claims with a grain of salt). Like many Sufi authors, al-Makki relates the qualities of the members of the spiritual hierarchy to the supreme religious personalities of Islam, the Prophet Muhammad and, to a lesser extent, his son-in-law and cousin, 'Ali.

Al-Makki comments on various figures from the Sufi tradition, both from India and from beyond. He describes two famous Sufi saints, "Abd al-Qadir Jilani ("Reviver of the Faith, Servant of the Almighty, from Gilan" in Persia, d. 1166) and Nizam al-Din Awliya' Bada'oni ("Order of the Faith, the Saint of Saints, from Badaryn" in northern India, d. 1325) as having attained the highest possible station, that of being the beloved of God; Nizam al-Din, whose tomb is in Delhi, was the teacher of al-Makki's teacher. Al-Makki reports that this was confirmed to him personally by the deathless master Khidr, who has initiated many well-known Sufis.

He also takes up the controversial topic of the ecstatic sayings of the early Sufis Hallaj ("woolcarder," executed in Baghdad in 922) and Bayazid Bistami ("Father of Yazid, from Bistam" in Persia, d. 874); Hallaj was renowned for having said "I am the Truth," whereas Bayazid was famous for saying "Glory be to Me! How great is My Majesty!" Although these sayings were considered blasphemous, al-Makki argues that they are manifestations of the divine essence. He maintains that the divine essence is unitary, despite appearances, and that it is the source of all attributes, whether relative or absolute. The essence is the medium through which God relates to the created world, and it is through this medium that the attributes are manifested in the created beings.

The final passage concerns an extraordinary meditation retreat that al-Makki undertook under the direction of an otherwise unknown Sufi who maintained a hospice in Egypt; al-Makki arrived there from India by levitation. The experiences that are described here put al-Makki on a higher level of mystical experience than the early Sufis whose sayings he has criticized. Al-Makki informs us that he has attained the manifestation of the essence, and has truly gone beyond his ego.

Sayyid Muhammad ibn Ja’far al-Makki al-Husayni was one of the greatest of the designated successors of Shaykh Naṣir al-Din Mahmūd ("Master Helper of the Faith, the Praised," d. 1356); in unity and unification he has a lofty station. He is among the solitary saints of the saints. Regarding that which he himself has written about his internal and external states, the intellect is amazed. If all of this is without taint of obscurationism and is purely what it appears to mean, then he is one of the perfect ones of the age (may God sanctify his conscience).

He has a book entitled The Sea of Meanings in which are explained many realities of unity and sciences of the Sufis and secrets of gnosis. He speaks with intoxication, and he has other books: The Subtleties of Meanings and The Realities of Meanings, which he promises to write, but God knows if they have been written or not. He has other books: a treatise explaining the Spirit, and a treatise called The Five Points, and The Sea of Relationships, in which is an explanation of the family of the Prophet Makki, showing his relation to his ancestors. He makes many claims, but he has verified by experiencing the internal states that he explains.

He had a long life, from the time of Sultan Muhammad ibn Tughluq [d. 1351] to the time of Sultan Buhāl [r. 1451–1489], his years exceeding one hundred. His forefathers are of the Sharifs of Mecca, having come to Delhi and established themselves in Shirin. Now his tomb is in the same city. He says in The Sea of Meanings: "For a period of sixty years I remained in external knowledge, pursuing the acquisition of excellence, and I was heedless of the eternal Beloved and the eternal goal. For thirty years I have been seeing that which is shown, and I have been hearing that which the ear hears. Beloved! The range of the thoughts of the externalists and their barren intellects are impediments; and if not, I shall set off in the trappings of ceaslessness to the desert of eternity! The little that I say, Beloved, is that which has not been heard. That which I say from the wordless promise of 'and he has the Mother of the Book' [Qur. 39.13] is put into words, and it is unknown to humanity. It is thirty-three years since I have repented of what humanity says, and no object has been attained from what I say."

In that book he explains about the substitutes and pegs and axes and solitary and the other men of God, and he has distinguished and differentiated their numbers, names, ranks, prayers, ages, states, and divisions, beyond which nothing could be conceived, and he has said, "I have had conversation with all of them and have been blessed by each, and I have contemplated all of their stations." And he says, "There are 357 different substitutes, and I conversed with them on the mountain at the source of the Nile, where they were dwelling, living on the gum of trees and the locusts of the deserts."
And he also says, "O Beloved! There is no number to the society of solitaries. They are many and are veiled from the sight of humanity, although the chief axis and some of the axes know them and see them. Wherever the perfect solitaries are, who are the manifestations of the aspect of the singularity of 'Ali (God ennable his countenance), they advance on the path. They find a rank by the heart of the Prophet (and 'Ali, God ennable his countenance, found a rank by the spirit of the Prophet). When from the heart vessels of the Prophet they advance on the path, they arrive to the true axis, and from the station of the true axis to the station of Beloved, which is unity.

"O Beloved! In the station of the axis, out of all the saints, two have attained the station of Beloved, which no one else like them has attained. Who are those two, Beloved? The first is Shaykh al-Dīn 'Abd al-Qādir Jīlānī, the second Shaykh Nizām al-Dīn Bādā'omī; both were vessels of the spirit of Muhammad, Beloved! You have considered well; nothing comes from my pen that has not been witnessed. Beloved! One day I was in the company of the Revered Khīdr [the "Green One"] in a boat on the Nile in Egypt, and some words were spoken of the contemplation of the unending. Khīdr also said that Shaykh al-Dīn 'Abd al-Qādir Jīlānī and Shaykh Nizām al-Dīn Bādā'omī were in the station of Beloved."

And he also says, "O Beloved! Nineteen years I was sober, and twenty-one years I was intoxicated to the extent that I knew nothing, but I was in the neighborhood of Shaykh Ya'qūb who was the axis of the region. He told me of these twenty-one years of mine, so it was known that I was intoxicated for twenty-one years. And after this time, by the grace of the master in his solitariness, it is some years since I descended from the state of intoxication.

I am a single pearl; I sat down alone
for in myself I have many lights from singleness;
if I am not Moses (Mūsā), I am still a songbird (māst),
for there is a musician within my breast.

"O Beloved! Ibn al-'Arabī [Son of the Arab," d. 1240], author of The Bezels, writes that in Mūsār Hallāj ["Victorious, the Woolcarder," d. 922] was the manifestation of the essence, and that he held the station of the solitaries. But I say that if the manifestation of the essence had been in Mūsār Hallāj, he never would have said 'I am the Truth' nor would another [Bayāzīd Bīšāmī, d. 874] have uttered 'Glory be to Me,' because the manifestation of the essence is effacement—and what does the effaced know of 'who am I?' and 'what am I?' so that he would say 'I am the Truth' and 'Glory be to me'? 'He who knows God is dumb' in the manifestation of essence 'and becomes eloquent' in the manifestation of attributes. In the manifestation of attributes and acts and words, it is right, Beloved, when the dervish is totally absorbed in the manifestation of attributes. Then he sees himself by the glory of one of his attributes, that is: the essence of the possible existence becomes absorbed by the light of

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the glory of the attributes into the attributes of the necessary existence; and that attribute enters, as a necessary existence, into the temporal, and utterly ravishes away the being of the possible existence. When this attribute [one of the divine names, as ‘Truth,’ ‘Grace,’ ‘Wrath,’ etc.] has ravished someone in this way, it enters into his speech, and he says ‘Glory be to Me’ and ‘I am the Truth’ and ‘Truly God is speaking by the tongue of ‘Umar.’ What shall I do? Iblīs or ‘Abū Bakr is no longer living. I would have said to him what I said here, and he would have heard that which is certain.

“My words are not the measure of The Sea of Meanings. Who can bear it? Where are there still words? God willing, one day I shall write of that Beloved. Beloved! When by the grace of the ‘Solitary of Reality,’ Shaykh Naṣr al-Dīn Mahmūd [his master], there was advancement on the path of wayfaring, from the manifestation of attributes to the manifestation of essence—which is the station of solitariness—I descended in a veiled condition. In a dream I saw the ‘solitary of reality’ repeating a silent chant; I entered and pressed the face of supplication in the dust. On his blessed tongue came the words, ‘You royal falcon of the field of the world of divinity, and pure one come from the world of power, and player in the worlds of the angels and humanity!’ After that a longing flickered across my eyes, and he said, ‘This longing is for the light of the glory of the essence.’ This dream happened in the year 811 [1407 C.E.].

“When night came I was levitated from the town of Khātīlān (in Afghanistan) and entered Egypt. I was honored with kissing the feet of Shaykh Awhād Simnānī [‘Master Unique, from Simnān’ in Central Asia], who at that time was the axis of the world. He also praised me by the same words that the ‘Solitary of Reality’ had praised me with. He was in his cell, and told me to take one corner. In the room there were two men, a Sufi and a student. I did the sunset prayers levitating, and performed evening prayers in company with the axis of the world, Shaykh Awhād Simnānī. After that, for two-thirds of the night I read the Qur‘ān through three times completely and sixteen of its thirty sections in addition. I looked down and my body had become light, and it encompassed the great throne [of God], and the great throne became as a mustard seed in my sight. Then I looked at myself, and the very hairs of my person became images, and I looked at each image, and I saw that it was the image of myself. Then the images began to be obliterated, and then I looked and all the worlds, the heavens, and the souls began to take on an indescribable condition, and all the manifestations of attributes and actions and influences began to be obliterated. Beloved! This is the very obliteration into obliteration!

“Just then in the twinkling of an eye I traveled through seven hundred thousand worlds of manifestations. Then by an immediate Word I heard the command: ‘O my servant! My glory is a veil on my beauty, and my beauty is the light of my glory, and you are between my glory and my beauty!’ After the Word, I was enabled by the manifestation of the essence, the nature of which is only attainable by witnessing. From that time I descended into the world of
divinity, which is the place of solitariness. After the manifestation of the essence, on the seventeenth day I entered the world of sobriety; I was still dwelling in the cell of Shaykh Awhad Simnânî.

I became drunk with Him, by the wine of longing,
my being became lost in His;
our existence became nonexistent in His existence—
everything but Him was scorned.
When I became perfectly detached from existence,
neither name nor reality remained to me.
When Muḥammad became annihilated from being,
who else could he see? There was no other!

"Then, Beloved! After the manifestation of the essence in the cell of Shaykh Awhad Simnânî, I lost my senses, and on the seventeenth day the shaykh himself came into the cell and kissed me on the forehead. If the shaykh had not been fully aware of my condition, the very companions of my cell would have ensnared me as a dead man for burial. Then I returned to the world of sobriety. This was because of the beginning of manifestation: for some time thereafter, wherever I looked I saw a light that was joined with me; this image is the 'hangover' of the station of solitariness, which grasps all creation on the level of nobility. And all this was from the blessed words of the 'Solitary of Reality' (God sanctify his secret!). For one day 'the king of the verifiers,' the great prince Ja'far Naṣīr (who is my father) was seated in the presence of my master, who said, 'Amīr Ja'far Muhammad is the royal falcon of the field of divinity; he will be influenced by the blessings of over three hundred and seventy saints, the axes and the solitaries, and he will be ennobled by these blessings.' And on that day I was in the presence of the master Mawlawâ Shams al-Dîn Yahyâ ["Our Master Sun of the Faith, Living," fourteenth century], disciple of Nizâm al-Dîn Awhyâ [God sanctify his secret!], reading digests. Praise be to God, Lord of Creation. Beloved! When I was united to this station, I brought these verses to speech:

Now I say, I don't know who I am;
this slave is not the Creator; then what am I?
Slavery was obliterated, but no freedom remained;
no atom of happiness or misery remained in my heart.
I was without quality or direction;
I am a gnostic, but I have no gnostic.
I don't know whether you are I or I am you;
I was annihilated in you, duality became lost.

"Beloved! For the lost one, whence comes this speech? Whoever speaks, speaks of the manifestation of the attributes. In the manifestation of the attributes, there is speech. When I want to write something about that Beloved, I have become sobered from the manifestation of the eternal essence. That is the
reason; otherwise, what does this Beloved have to do with these words? One should ask that Beloved in prayer that he hold this beggar in the world of sobriety, so that I may put the wordless library into words for that Beloved. Beloved! You have considered well, and have said goodbye to the house of humanity. Beloved!

Enter bravely, for in this path, scent and color have no worth.

Arise as the whole from existence, don't fall in the narrow path.

Tie a Magian belt around your waist, then go chant in the temples.

Know of a truth, that in the two worlds, in your path, the only trap is you.

This noble letter was completed on the last of Shawwal, 824 [October 27, 1421]."

The Life of Burhan al-Din Gharib

Another kind of sacred biography is the eulogistic praise of a saint by devotees who are interested in the power of the saint as an intercessor with God. This kind of hagiography is not so much concerned with teachings as with demonstrations of power, often in the form of miracles. Retrospective portraits of saints by later devotees stress prophecies of their coming, attributed to famous early Sufis, and they often emphasize the establishment of the center that later becomes the focus of pilgrimage to the saint's tomb. Frequent also is an admixture of political considerations, based on the desire of kings to borrow legitimacy from the saints by becoming patrons of their shrines.

In the selection that follows, an anonymous author describes the life of Burhan al-Din Gharib (“Proof of the Faith, the Poor Man,” d. 1337), a master of the Chishti Sufi order. It is noteworthy that the author does indicate that the text, *The Victory of the Saints*, was composed in the city of Burhanpur in western India in 1620, and that it was dedicated to the Mughul governor ‘Abd al-Rahim Khān-i Khānān (“Servant of the Merciful, Ruler of Rulers,” d. 1627) and the emperor Jahāngīr (“World-Ruler,” d. 1627); this occurred, coincidentally, during a siege of Burhanpur by the forces of the Deccan kingdom of Ahmadnagar. Since the tomb of Burhan al-Din Gharib lay in Ahmadnagar territory, in the town of Khuldabad near Daulatabad fort, it is tempting to conclude that the commissioning of this hagiography by the Mughul governor was at least in part an assertion of Mughul sovereignty over the Deccan, which is here called the dominion of Burhan al-Din Gharib. The emperor Akbar’s conquest of Burhanpur in 1601 appears to be the fulfillment of Burhan al-Din Gharib’s prophecy nearly three centuries earlier, and it implicitly places the Mughuls in the position of being patrons and rulers over the Deccan as well. The emphasis on the saints as agents of conversion to Islam fits in with the imperialistic ambitions of the Mughuls and other rulers, and is wholly lacking in Sufi texts of the fourteenth century. The interpenetration of
political and religious symbolism is also indicated by the use of the title “Sultan” to describe Burhan al-Din Gharib.

This biography begins by describing a miraculous encounter in which the great saint of Delhi, Nizam al-Din Awliya’ (“Order of the Faith, the Saint of Saints,” d. 1325), is given a boon by heaven, that whomsoever he entrusts with any dominion will retain it forever. According to this concept, every major saint is responsible for a particular territory around his shrine, and has supreme spiritual and temporal authority there. Then the text tells how Nizam al-Din sent his chief successors to various parts of India to assume their dominions. The main concern is now how Burhan al-Din Gharib is assigned the Deccan (the southern region of India, south of the Tapti River down to the Tungabadra, roughly comprising the present states of Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh). The Deccan had previously been in the care of Burhan al-Din Gharib’s brother Muntajib al-Din, but through a hint of Nizam al-Din it is revealed that he has just passed away. When Burhan al-Din Gharib expresses his anguish at parting from his master, Nizam al-Din sends along his sandals as symbols of his authority as well as a company of seven hundred (or fourteen) of his disciples. Burhan al-Din Gharib then heads for Daulatabad, but halts to pray on the site of a future city, Burhanpur; that would be named after him. His holiness and prayers are invoked as the basis for the foundation of the city, the establishment of his tomb-shrine, and for the presence of later Chishti saints in the region of Burhanpur, such as Shah Nu’man (“King Beneficent,” d. 1476–77). The saint’s prophecy about Akbar uses traditional local Indian imagery of fertility and power, showing the king discovering the form of an elephant in a massive stone in the Tapti River; Akbar then caused the stone to be carved in that shape (the elephant stone was still being worshiped by Hindus in the seventeenth century, according to European travelers).

Of the actual religious behavior and teaching of the saint, only a fraction remains. The biographer falsely ascribes “many writings” to the saint, though extensive works by Burhan al-Din Gharib’s disciples refute this. The biography concludes only by observing that the saint was celibate and that he taught many disciples (both points confirmed by other sources). This hagiography is of less value for the actual life of the saint than as an indication of the religious and political concerns of later generations, for whom the saint acts as a source of authority.

The translation is from an anonymous manuscript, “Fatih al-Awliya’,” in the collection of the Committee Khuddamin Dargahat Rauza Kalan, Khuldabad, pp. 18–25. No other copies of this document are known.

Further Reading

In praise of the revered sultan of the gnostics, the axis of the wayfarers, the cream of the companions of reality, the exemplar of the lords of the path, the sun of the sphere of excellence and perfection, the revealer of the secrets of majesty and beauty, who is raised up on the pillars of unity and stability, Sultan Burhān al-Dīn Fārūqī al-Chishti. He was one of the worthy successors of the revered sultan of the masters, Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā'. He was for a time in the company of the latter, and reached the degree of perfection in meditation, piety, asceticism, and Godfearing. He has many writings in the science of spiritual realities and wayfaring, and he is the master of the dominion of the entire Deccan.

One day, the sultan of the Sufis, the lamp of the Chishtis, Master Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā' was in the state of joy and expansion, in the intoxicated feast of select divine manifestations of the essence and royal attributes, which is the encompassing sea of divine illuminations. He was totally immersed in the sea of annihilation, drowned and absorbed in God, when suddenly a loving voice from the divine presence reached his conscious hearing, saying, "Nizām al-Dīn, ask for whatever desire you have, for it will be given to you, and request whatever object you have, for it will appear from the hidden veil into the manifest world." Since the state of absorption overpowered him, he remained silent. A second time also the voice gave the same cry, but the master did not attend to it, and did not turn his face from the prayer-direction of his absorption, and because of that state he did not raise his head from the form of the treasury-seraglio of unity. Then a third time the voice conveyed the good news of acceptance to his blessed ears, saying, "Nizām al-Dīn, you are a marvel to be without desire, for from the limitless bounties of the divine presence and the sublime sources of lordly grace, you hold yourself back." The master arose, full of the well of meditation and vision, and pressed the face of indigence in the earth of weakness and helplessness.

He lifted up the hand of prayer hopeful of answer to the threshold of majesty and said, "My God and Lord, let anyone to whom Nizām gives dominion hold it safely until the resurrection, and give no change or alteration in that path." The prayer of the master was chosen to be answered in the court of God, whose existence witnesses and comprehends all existences. After a few days, having commanded each of his successors, who were perfect and unsurpassed in the realm of asceticism and discipline, to reside in a city and a dominion, he dispatched them. For example, in the environs of Gujarat, he put the exemplar of those who attain union and the prayer-direction of the people of the inner path, Master Husain al-Dīn ["Sword of the Faith," d. 1329] safely in as master of the domain; in the realm of Delhi, he honored the axis of axes, the knower of the secrets of reality, the announcer of the illuminations of the religious law, Master Naṣr al-Dīn Mahmūd Chirāgh-i Dihlī ["Helper of the Faith, the Praised, the Lamp of Delhi," d. 1356]; in the realm of the Deccan, he gave the portion to the master of religion, knower of principle and application, master of chivalry and piety, Muntajib al-Dīn ["Chosen of the Faith," d. 1309?]; and in the domain of Malwa he appointed the standard of master of religion, Master Wajih
al-Din Yusuf ["Leader of the Faith, Joseph," fourteenth century]. Likewise, he appointed each one of them over every cline and domain, and each one over a realm and district. This was because God has made the prophetic faith and Muhammadan proof eternal until the resurrection, and as long as they remain externally alive, they will call creation to the faith of Muhammad the Chosen (God bless him and grant him peace) and convey every seeker of God to his desire. After they leave the station of impermanence for the palace of eternity, until "the day when the hour [of judgment] arrives" [Qur. 31.12], every later saint that appears in these territories is from their giving grace and their internal assistance. Every rebel and sinner who has been of the community of our revered Prophet Muḥammad the Messenger (God bless him and grant him peace) is taken into the divine mercy and forgiven through the concentration of their saintly spirits.

It is related that one day Master Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā' (may God sanctify his conscience) was performing ablutions, and Sultan Burhān al-Dīn (may God sanctify his conscience) was present in the fortunate assembly, rendering the customary service, pouring water from a vessel he held in his hand. The master [Niẓām al-Dīn] glanced at the sultan [Burhān al-Dīn Gharib] affectionately, and asked, "Was Master Muntajib al-Dīn your elder or younger brother?" The sultan knew by his prescience for certain, and realized by the indication of his master, and had intelligence by his cardiology and wit, that the master just mentioned had been joined to the mercy of God. The next day he prepared the materials for the third-day funeral observance, and attended the noble gathering. Several of the lovers wondered and asked the sultan the meaning of this. He said, "When the revered master's blessed tongue asked whether my brother Muntajib al-Dīn was elder or younger, by prescience I knew for certain that my brother had passed away, because the word 'was' indicated the past tense." After that, before the whole assembly, Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā' (may God sanctify his conscience) said to him, "I have made you the leader in place of Muntajib al-Dīn, I have made you my successor. You should go to Daulatabad."

The sultan obediently accepted the pearl-like words of the master and put the seal of silence on his lips, but in his thoughts, from the pain of separation from the master, a great grief and bitter pain appeared. From this condition, pain and perturbation began to beat in waves upon him. From both of his eyes tears ran as from the springs of rivers, and weeping overwhelmed him. The meaning of his condition could not fit into the capacity of mere words. At this point the master came and examined his condition, and enquired of him the cause of his consternation. He replied, "I will be separated from these sandals." The master replied, "The master will be your companion," meaning, "Take the sandals as your companions." The sultan obediently placed the noble sandals on his head, and pressed his blessed forehead to the grace-bestowing threshold. From the pain of separation, the fear of loneliness, and the dread of trouble, however, he reached a point such that despite all his perfect self-possession, and control of the reins of will, the halter of disturbance slipped out of the
grasp of his will, and from his extreme sadness and regret, and his great terror and pains, losing sight of his own aspirations he could not set foot outside his master's hospice.

They say that a second time Master Nizâm al-Dîn Awhiya' (may God sanctify his conscience) became aware of his condition, and his luminous eye perceived that no amount of preaching could make the heart grasp the hem of patience. To his spiritual son he said, "What is the cause of the delay in your leaving?"

With weakness and humility, he replied, "I shall be separated from the eternal assembly of the laws of God." When he saw and witnessed his painful, lamenting, and burning cry, then by way of generosity and affection he gave the whole assembly, with all the noble successors and disciplined disciples, to the sultan, saying, "The master will be your companion." Some say the successors and disciples were seven hundred, and others hold that there were fourteen hundred who came in the company of the sultan. Among the successors, one was Amîr Hasan ["Prince Fine," d. after 1329], the second Master Kamâl Khujandî ["Perfection, from Khujand" in Central Asia], the third Master Jâm ["the master of Jam," from Afghanistan], the fourth Master Fâkhûr al-Dîn ["pride of the faith"], the fifth Master Nasîr al-Dîn Chirâghî Dihlî, and other masters. At the time of farewell, he honored him with five guidances. The first was the cloaks of service that were entrusted to him in the traditional way from the time of Master 'Uthmân Harwâni ["Uthmân, from Harwan" in Central Asia, d. 1211] and from Master Mu'in al-Dîn Chišštî ["Aider of the Faith, from Chishit" in Afghanistan, d. 1236] and others, which had been intended for Mawlâna Da'ûd-i Husayn Shirâzî ["Our Master David, Son of the Mountain"], known as Master Zayn al-Dîn ["Adornment of the Faith," d. 1369], for they would reach the latter, just as these events will be explained in the section on Master Zayn al-Dîn. The second guidance was [illegible]. Third, "Do not abandon the communal Friday prayer." Fourth, "Do not forget to inquire after the condition of my master's daughter who dwells here." Fifth, "Always remain celibate."

After hearing the five points, he headed toward Daulatabad, and in the year 720 [1320 C.E.; actually 1329] he reached Daulatabad. They say that the sultan, after completing several stages in a few days, reached the land of this city [Burhanpur]. It was a very pleasant and delightful place, and he saw an inhabited village. Longing for it to be established [as a city] took root that day in his luminous mind. He spread a cloth to stand on, by the bank of the Tapti river. The sultan stood and made ablutions and performed communal prayer on the stone in the middle of the river that they call the "elephant stone." Entering into intimate conversation with God, the holy and exalted Creator, he asked that in this place a town by the name of Burhanpur become inhabited. This became a prayer chosen to be granted, inasmuch as the news of blessing in respect of the habituation of this region reached from the hidden world into his ear. When he was praying the midnight prayers and was absorbed in recollection of God in the middle of the night, he summoned one of the knowers.
of His secrets [an angel]. Regarding what he said, the power of God opened up his heart to its destiny; an inhabited city appeared to his vision, so that the beholder became astonished at its habitation.

After the dawn prayer, he was said to leave for Daulatabad. The best time of all the days in the environs of that region was illuminated by the vision of that graceful one. Since the groups of scholars and notables residing together there obtained perfect delight and inclusive participation in his pure and eternal authority and his abundantly blessed company, after a few days, some of the dear ones received his permission to depart, and returned to Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā' (may God sanctify his conscience). And some remained in the service of the sultan, and today the tombs of the lovers are famous and well known, near his blessed shrine.

After some years, Shah Nu'man [d. 1476-77] was residing down below the Asir fort [near Burhanpur]. The influence of his [Burhan al-Dīn Gharib's] prayers was manifest. This desert and desolation had become inhabited, and its fortune had been sustained by Burhan al-Dīn Awliyā'.

When the revered nester in the divine throne, the crown-bestower on the face of the earth, the victorious by the grace of God, the eternal king Jalāl al-Dīn Muhammad Akbar Pādshāh ["Glory of the Faith, the Praised, the Greatest, the Emperor," d. 1605], in the year 1008 (1600 C.E.; actually 1601) honored the region of Burhanpur, and conquered the fortress of Asir, at that time he made it that stone called the "elephant stone" into the shape of an elephant and made a statue from its internal meaning which lacked external thought, so that it would remain forever the chief memento (of his conquest).

It is related that one day the mother of the sultan ordered him to get married. This presented a great difficulty to the sultan, for the advice of his master was to remain celibate and his mother's pleasure lay in his getting married. That very day he vowed to fast, and he said, "I am fasting. Whenever I break my fast, I will do whatever I am ordered." And he formed the intention to fast for several years. As time went on, the weakness of his body reached such a point that at the time of kneeling and prostration, his brain was disturbed. Then his mother passed away, and the sultan did not maintain his asceticism [but remained celibate].

For some time he bestowed knowledge of truth and divine gnosis on the people of that place, and he brought plenty of people to the universal goal and the essential object, and conveyed the basis of divine gnosis. In the year 738 [1337 C.E.] the bird of his spirit took flight from the defile of humanity, and in Daulatabad he built his angelic nest. His blessed shrine, which is full of grace and the first spirit, is located two miles from the fort of Daulatabad.

The Miracles of Ahmad Sirhindī

One of the most controversial religious figures in Mughul India was Ahmad Kabūlī Sirhindī ("Praiseworthy, from Kabul [in Afghanistan], and from Sirhind" in north-

LIVES OF...
LIVES OF SUFI SAINTS

WEST INDIA, 1562–1624). He was initially a successful scholar attached to the court of the emperor Akbar ("The Greatest," d. 1605) and was associated with the prime minister Abū al-Fazl (Abul Fazl, "Father of Excellence," d. 1601). He underwent a great change, however, when he was initiated into the Naqshbandi Sufi order under the guidance of the Central Asian master Bāqī Bilāh ("Abiding in God," d. 1603). As the excerpt below shows, Sirhindī gained notoriety from appearing to claim, in one of his widely circulated epistles, that he was spiritually superior to one of the companions of the Prophet Muhammad, 'Abū Bakr. Eventually, criticism of Sirhindī's claims led Emperor Jahāngīr to imprison him in 1619 for a year, and the controversies continued through the nineteenth century both in India and in Arabia.

In the twentieth century, Muslim nationalists gave Sirhindī a new role as defender of Islam against the heresies of the emperor Akbar. This is based primarily on a few selected passages in his writings that are critical of Akbar and Abū al-Fazl and that show a markedly hostile attitude to Hindus in the Mughul bureaucracy. These remarks took on new significance in the polemical climate of religious nationalism, which now tried to read Indian history as an eternal conflict between Islam and Hinduism. The same attitude places the Mughul prince Dārā Shikāh on the side of his great-grandfather Akbar, because of Dārā's interest in translating Sanskrit religious texts (such as the Upaniṣads) into Persian. Curiously, this political judgment is shared by Hindu fundamentalists, but in their view one simply reverses the evaluation, so that Sirhindī becomes an evil fanatic, while Akbar and Dārā become tolerant liberals.

The extract given below is the description of Sirhindī from Dārā Shikāh's well-known biographical work on Sufi saints, The Ship of the Saints, which was written in 1640. Contrary to the political interpretation just mentioned, Dārā does not find Sirhindī to be an opponent, nor does the latter's attitude toward Hindus seem to be of interest. Instead, Dārā is concerned to defend Sirhindī from criticism. The defense of Sirhindī as a saint is based on the direct testimony of Dārā's spiritual master. Miyan Mir ("Respected Prince," d. 1635) of Lahore, who personally observed Sirhindī's miraculous ability to read unspoken thoughts. When Miyan Mir met Sirhindī, he decided to test Sirhindī by thinking of three questions for him to answer. The first question related to the charge that he claimed superiority to Abū Bakr. The second question was the accusation that Sirhindī's master Bāqī Bilāh had begun to teach without authorization from his own master Khwajā Amlan ("Mastery, from Amlan" in Central Asia, d. 1599–1600); this was a charge made against a newcomer by disgruntled older disciples. The third question was Sirhindī's opinion of the man who initially questioned Bāqī Bilāh's credentials, Khwāwand Mahmūd ("Praised," d. 1642–43). Sirhindī passed the test. He spontaneously produced the controversial letter (the eleventh in his collected epistles) and showed it to Miyan Mir, who found it blameless. He related how Khwāwand Mahmūd questioned Bāqī Bilāh's authorization to teach, and told how he himself refuted it and persuaded Khwāwand Mahmūd of the truth. Finally, Sirhindī smoothed over any dispute with Khwāwand Mahmūd by praising him and attributing any problems to the latter's followers. The text is of particular interest.

As Ahmad Kabīlī writes, Sirhindī's role as "sirhind" in north-
because it shows how different Dārā's perception of Sirhindī was from the modern political view of them both.

This text is translated from Dārā Shikoh, Safīnāt al-awilīā, edited by Mr. Beale (Agra: Marba'-i Madrasa-i Agrah, 1853), pp. 339–41.

Further Reading


As in other autocracies, a public role for women was unknown in Safavid Iran. Iraq was a rare exception. Women participated in the public arena, and their voices were heard. Concerns Bībī Jamālī, who is known as Bibi Jawd, to which this passage occurs, not to have been the previous selection of Bībī Jamālī and Bibi Jawd. As Bābā Jamālī, Bībī Jamālī has been described for having her status elevated by the Safavids, an honor she had received after a time in exile. In general, this status was rare for women in Iran and Iraq.

Dārā Shikoh's practice of converting his relatives to Islam, as in the case of Bibi Jawd, is not unique. In fact, such conversions were common among the Safavids, and they often involved prominent figures from various backgrounds. Bibi Jamālī's conversion to Islam, along with her elevation to a position of power and influence in the Safavid court, highlights the degree to which the Safavid dynasty sought to integrate non-Muslim groups into its political and religious structures.

Bibi Jamālī's role in the Safavid court was significant, as she was involved in important diplomatic and administrative affairs. Her conversion to Islam and her elevation to a position of power and influence were indicative of the Safavid dynasty's efforts to integrate non-Muslim communities into its political and religious structures. Bibi Jamālī's story serves as a reminder of the complexities of religion and politics in the Safavid period, as well as the role that women could play in shaping the course of events.
since one day the learned Khwājaṯ Amkunāṯ was eating watermelon, and having himself cut it in pieces, gave it into the hands of bystanders and disciples, but he did not give it to Master Bāqi." Those present said, "The Master [Baqi Billah] is here too," but the learned Khwājaṯ Amkunāṯ said, "We have given him watermelon in the right way." From this Master Bāqi became conceited, thinking, "He has authorized me to give guidance.""

"I [Sirhind] said, "This is not so, for we have never heard such words from our master or others; rather, Master Baqi used to deny it, saying, 'This act was never done by me, and I cannot be responsible for it. The learned Khwājaṯ [actually] said, "We gave authorization and you ought to do this work.' At this time some of the older men [present during the conversation between Khwāwand Mahmūd and Sirhind] also said, "We were present in the assembly, when the learned Khwājaṯ gave authorization for guidance to Master Bāqi." Master Khwāwand Mahmūd then admitted, "We have listened to error.'

"Then Shaykh Ahmad said, 'Do you believe what you have heard from the disciples of Master Khwāwand Mahmūd? The master is not like that, and I do not believe that of him.'"

All three doubts had passed through the thoughts of my revered teacher [Miyān Mīr], and the shaykh [Ahmad Sirhind] answered them.

His death took place in the year 1034 [1624 C.E.], and the length of his life was sixty-three years. His tomb is in Sirhind.

A Woman Saint: Bibi Jamāl Khâtūn

As in other sectors of Islamic culture, women played an important though less public role than men in Islamic mysticism. Among the early Sufis in Iran and Iraq were a number of prominent women, and during the growth of Sufi orders women participated as patrons and disciples of Sufi masters. The following extract concerns Bibi Jamāl Khâtūn ("Lady Beauty Noblewoman," d. 1647), also known as Bibi Jiv, the sister of the Sufi leader Miyan Jiv or Miyan Mir (d. 1635). This passage occurs in The Peace of the Saints, which Darā Shikōh (author of the previous selection) wrote between 1640 and 1642 as a biography of Miyan Jiv and his disciples.

Darā Shikōh, himself a disciple of Miyan Jiv, knew Bibi Jamāl Khâtūn and held her in great respect. As a sign of his esteem, he placed her biography immediately after that of her brother, before the notices of Miyan Jiv’s other disciples; large biographical works, such as Darā’s own The Ship of the Saints, typically put the biographies of female mystics in an appendix at the end of the book. Darā describes her saintly virtues in somewhat stereotyped and formulaic terms, comparing her to the famous early woman Sufi, Rābi’a ("Fourth Daughter," d. 801) of Basra. This selection, typically, emphasizes her miracles as a sign of her spirituality.

Bibi Jamāl Khâtūn is an example of a woman who independently pursues a
spiritual path in a way that includes but goes beyond the normal social role of family life. Her mother Bibi Fatima had been widowed at an early age and had returned to live and study with her father, Qazi Qazin (the "Judging Judge"), a renowned Sufi of Sind (in southern Pakistan). Although Bibi Fatima trained all her five sons and two daughters in Sufi practice, Miyân Jîv was the one who had the strongest mystical vocation, and all his brothers and sisters later became his disciples and followed his path (tarîqa) or spiritual method. Bibi Jamâl Khâtûn was nonetheless outstanding even in this spiritually talented family, as shown by the vision in which she saw her brother predict the date of his death.

Although Bibi Jamâl Khâtûn married, Dârâ Shîkîh treats it as an unimportant event, to the extent that he fails to mention her husband's name. Evidently she had no children, and after six years of marriage she lived apart from her husband, who must have died or divorced her four years later. The choice of celibacy was her conscious decision to seek a closer relation to God; her later life was passed primarily in prayer and meditation, and she never left her home in Sîs-vanîn in Sind.

The miracles ascribed to Bibi Jamâl Khâtûn stress her attainment of mystical states. The episode of the fish, which became luminous after her gaze fell on it when she emerged from a powerful trance, illustrates the concept of mystical experience as the contemplation of light; the light not only filled the soul of the saint, but also spilled over onto an ordinary object like a fish, which was then preserved as a holy relic and source of blessing. Her other miracles also concern household items, like the chicken and the wheat that can feed any number of guests, and the transformation of oil into milk; her blessings also produce sons. Despite her relative isolation, she evidently had many visitors who sought her help. Her contact with Jalâl Khâmûsh, a recently deceased saint, shows how the invisible hierarchy was consulted by ordinary people; they referred problems to her, the most eminent living Sufi in the district, and she in turn invoked God's blessings on someone with higher spiritual status, so that he would convey divine assistance to the petitioner. The fact that Jalâl Khâmûsh was dead in no way impaired his ability to act as an intercessor with God.

Five years after completing the book, Dârâ Shîkîh appended a postscript giving the date of Bibi Jamâl Khâtûn's death.


Memorial of the Felicitous Conditions Surrounding the Revered Bibi Jamâl Khâtûn (may God prolong the blessings of her noble breaths)

She is the sister of the revered Miyân Jîv (may God sanctify his conscience), and she is the daughter by whose existence the noble mother of the revered Miyân Jîv was ennobled. Today, in the year 1050 [1640–41 C.E.], she is still living. The reverend has exertions, and it is one of her time, and she is to do so.

In the beginning of exercises undertaken by the revered Miyân Jîv, Qazi Tahîr ["Judge"] occupied in this.

In accordance to one of the nun space of ten years they were bedfellows, in respect to me, in separate in her day, who prepared alone in that the absorption present his homeland, to see her, but praised her.

It is said the Prophets is absorbed in coming her blessed gate. The influence of this, that Bibi Jîv so your possession exists in the house to Muhammad Jîv, said, "I have approached, in all the day in such-and-such knowing me.

Another story, when cooking a certain she met with another bottle of oil, never as you much milk and a bit of food, Whatever need.

They say that the house met with another, the more oil to much as you and much milk and

And it is still
living. The revered Bibi Jiv mastered lofty states and stages, austerities, and exertions, and in renunciation and detachment she is unique. She is the Rab'ia of her time, and many miracles and wonders manifested from her and continue to do so.

In the beginning of her spiritual career, she entered into the path of spiritual exercises under the guidance of her illustrious mother and father. After that, the revered Miyân Jiv sent word to her, through the intermediary of his brother Qâzî Tâhir ["Judge Pure"], to occupy herself with his path. Thereafter, Bibi was occupied in this path.

In accordance with fate conformable to the religious law, she became joined to one of the nobly born and a legal bond was made between them, and for a space of ten years she was his spouse. Altogether six years passed that they were bedfellows. After that, a divine longing and love won the victory over her in respect to married life, and maintaining complete aloofness, she kept herself separate in her room. She has two maidervants who are at her service in the day, who prepare water for ablutions and other necessities. At night she is alone in that room, occupied with the remembrance of God. In these days absorption prevails over her. And from the time that the revered Miyân Jiv left his homeland, she did not come to see him, nor did the revered Miyân Jiv go to see her, but there was mutual inquiry, and the revered Miyân Jiv frequently praised her.

It is said that one day a fish was brought into Bibi's house when she was absorbed in ecstasy. When she came back from that state she opened her eyes; her blessed gaze, from which a light emanated, fell on that fish. From the influence of this glance, a luminosity appeared on that fish and remained. After that, Bibi Jiv said, "This fish has become holy, and when you preserve it among your possessions, much blessing will be evident in it." Until now, that fish exists in the house of one of her relatives, and its blessings are evident.

Muhammad Amin ["Praised, Trustworthy"], a nephew of the revered Miyân Jiv, said, "I heard Bibi say, "When the time of the revered Miyân Jiv's passing approached, in the angelic world he met me and said, "On such-and-such a day in such-and-such a month, I shall be a traveler in the realm of eternity. Knowing me to be present, occupy yourself with the remembrance of God.""]

Another story is that often, by the grace of the spirits of the saints, she was cooking a certain amount of food when many people came together. She asked to have a rooster brought, and the first time, saying, "In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate," with her own hand she slaughtered it to make a bit of food, and after that she would have someone else do the slaughtering. Whatever number of people were present, all were completely satisfied.

They say that one day for some reason milk was required and was not to be met with anywhere. This request was conveyed to Bibi Jiv, who asked for a bottle of oil, put her own blessed hand on it, and commanded, "Take milk, as much as you require." They saw that the bottle was full of milk. They got as much milk as they wanted.

And it is said that in the house of Amir Khan ["Prince Lord"], the judge of...
Tatia, there were several daughters. The family of Amir Khān, going in attendance on Bibi Jīv, made many supplications and lamentations, asking for a son. Bibi Jīv said, "After this there will be sons." From the blessing of her saying, five sons were born, one after another.

They say that once Bibi Jīv cast a quantity of two maunds [about two kilograms] of wheat into the wheat vessel with her own blessed hand. From the blessings of her hand, for a year the whole expense of the house was taken from that, and the wheat remained in the same condition.

They say that in those regions there had been a noble named Jālāl Khānush ["Glory, Silent"], who had perfect renunciation and detachment, from whom Bibi Jīv also had benefited internally. Whenever a difficulty befell anyone, or a need became pressing, they would refer it to the revered Bibi Jīv. Then Bibi Jīv would go to the grave of Shaykh Jālāl Khānush and spiritually turn to him. The problem of that person would be solved in accordance with her prayer.

The noble age of Bibi Jīv Khātun is in excess of sixty and she dwells in her own abode in Sīvastān, and she has never left that place for any other.

Her miracles are more numerous than one could list, but for the sake of blessing this piece of information was written after the composition of this book: her demise took place on Tuesday the twenty-seventh of Rabi’ the First in the year 1057 (May 2, 1647).