# SOME ASPECTS OF KHĀNQAH LIFE IN MEDIEVAL INDIA*

## (A) INTRODUCTORY

Few aspects of Muslim religious life during the middle ages are of such absorbing interest as the origin and growth of the mystic ideology and institutions. Though the mystic attitude is ' not the sole prerogative of any race, language or nation, ' the mystic movement in Islam has certain peculiar features of its own which make its study a necessary adjunct to a proper understanding of the history of medieval 'Ajam, including India. One of these features is the largescale establishment of *khānqahs* (1) for inculcating community spirit among the mystics and for the moral and spiritual culture of the people.

By the thirteenth century Muslim mystic ideology had reached a stage where, under the existing circumstances, no

* The writer of this article is dealing with the whole of *khānqah* life in medieval India in his book: *Studies in Indo-Muslim Mysticism*, which is in preparation. In this paper, some aspects of Khānqah-life during the early medieval period are being considered.

(1) The origin of the word *khānqah* is a moot point. Some scholars consider it to be a word of Turkish origin; others believe it to be Persian, being a compound of *khwān* and *gāh*. Shaikh Naṣīr al-Dīn Chirāgh considered it to be a compound of *khānah* (house) and *qah* (prayer) (see his conversations, *Khair al-Majālis*). Whatever the origin of the term, technically it means a house where mystics live and pray, according to the rules of their order. Maqrīzī thinks that the origin of the separate houses of worship may be traced back to the days of the Caliph Uthmān (vol. IV, p. 271). Ibn Taimiyya writes on the authority of *Akhbār al-Ṣūfiyya* that the first house for mystics was constructed at Basra (*Fatāwā Ibn Taimiyya*, II, p. 460); but he thinks that the popularity of *khānqahs* and *ribāṭs* starts with the Seljuq period (IV, p. 459). According to Jāmī, the first *Khānqah* was constructed by a Christian prince of Syria (*Nafaḥāt al-Uns*, p. 31-32).

further development was possible. Eminent mystic philosophers and thinkers like Imām Qushairī (ob. 1074), Imām Ghazzālī (ob. 1111), Shaikh Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī (ob. 1234), Shaikh Muḥyi'l-Dīn Ibn 'Arabī (ob. 1240) and Shaikh Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (ob. 1273) had consolidated mystic thought into a coherent discipline and a consistent philosophy. The only scope for its development was now in the field of *application.* The abstract mystic principles had to be applied to concrete conditions of society and transformed into space-time forces. The utter ruin of Muslim social life—the degeneration of Muslim morals and the disintegration of Muslim soul—during the period preceding and following the sack of Baghdad by Hulagu came as a challenge to the mystic thought. Would Muslim mysticism remain merely a cult for the interiorization of religious rites and lose its social value or would it organize a world-wide movement for the spiritual culture of humanity and thus save Muslim society from moral and spiritual inertia ? The mystics chose the second alternative and concentrated all their energies on the regeneration of Muslim society. At a time when Muslim political power was at its lowest ebb and anarchy and indiscipline reigned supreme (1), they divided the universe into spiritual territories *(wilāyats)* (2) and with clearly marked out spheres of jurisdiction set out to revitalize the spiritual life of the Muslims. The spiritual orders *(silsilahs)* were effectively organized to meet the situation and *khānqahs*, which henceforth became an integral part of the mystic discipline, were established on an extensive scale.

Muslim mysticism reached India when it had entered the last and the most important phase of its history—the organization of *silsilahs.* Almost simultaneously with the foundation

(1) See 'Aṭā Malik Juwainī, *Tārīkh-i-Jahān Gushā* (Gibb Memorial Series), pp. 33-35.

(2) " God has saints *(walīs)* ", writes Shaikh 'Alī Ḥujwirī, " whom he has distinguished by his friendship and who are the rulers of His dominion... As to the saintly officers of the Divine court who are in charge of affairs, there are three hundred, known as *Akhyār*, forty others known as *Abdāl*, seven others known as *Abrār*, four more known as *Auṭād*, three others known as *Nuqabā'* and one other known as *Quṭb* or *Ghauth.* These saints know each other and co-operate in their work ". *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, pp. 213-214.

of the Sultanate of Delhi, two mystic orders—the Chishtiyya and Suhrawardiyya—were introduced in India. In the century that followed they spread out in the country, built up their organizations and established themselves in their respective zones. Within a short span of time the entire country, from Multān to Lakhnautī and from Panīpat to Deogīr, was studded with *khānqahs*, *jamā'at khānahs* and *zāwiyahs* (1). Early in the 14th century a traveller informed Shihāb al-Dīn al-'Umarī in Damascus: " In Delhi and its surroundings are *khānqahs* and hospices numbering two thousand ". (2) These *khānqahs*, numerous and extensive as they were, soon wove themselves into the complex culture-pattern of India and helped removing that spirit of mistrust and isolation which honeycombed relations between the various culture-groups of India.

Fortunately for us, Amīr Ḥasan Sijzī, an eminent disciple of Shaikh Niẓām al-Dīn Auliyā, thought of recording the conversations that went on in the *khānqah* of his master and compiled a valuable book, the *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād*. The idea was epoch-making. It encouraged others to compile similiar records of the conversations of their masters. The mystic literature, thus produced in the form of *malfūẓāt* (records of the conversations of the mystic teachers), is of great historical value since it transports us into that serene spiritual atmosphere of the medieval Indian *khānqahs* where we can get a glimpse of the medieval society in all its fullness, if not in all its perfec-

(1) Though broadly used in the sense of hospices, these terms differ in their connotation. The *khānqah* was a spacious building, much like a royal palace, providing separate accommodation for every visitor and inmate. The *jamā'at khānah* was a large room where all disciples slept, prayed and studied sitting on the floor. The Chishtī saints built *jamā'at khānahs;* the Suhrawardīs constructed *khānqahs*. Common people, unable to appreciate the distinction, used the word *khānqah* even for the Chishti *jamā'at khānahs*, and now the term is used for all centres of spiritual activity without distinction. The *zāwiyahs* were smaller places where mystics lived and prayed but, unlike the inmates of *khānqahs* and *jama'at khānahs*, did not aim at establishing any vital contact with the world outside. In the 17th and the 18th centuries another type of *khānqahs*, the *dāerahs*, came into existence. The primary aim of these *dāerahs* was to provide place for men of one affiliation to devote their time to religious meditation. They were smaller than the *zāwiyahs*.

(2) *Masālik al-Abṣār fī Mamālik al-Amṣār*, English translation by O. Spies, p. 24.

tion—the moods and tensions of the common people, their religious ideals and spiritual cravings, their social tensions and economic urges—in fact, all the problems which agitated the medieval mind at all its levels, higher and lower.

The success of these *khānqahs* depended very largely on a Shaikh's ability to adjust and adapt himself to the mental climate of a particular region. What mystics call *nafs-i-gīra*—an intuitive intelligence that could understand, comprehend, control and direct the mind of the disciples—was needed in an abundant degree to fulfil the purpose of *khānqah* organization. Unless they identified themselves with the problems of the people, their worries, their hopes and their aspirations, these *khānqahs* could not gain the confidence of the people. When Shaikh Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Ṣūfī (1), a distinguished disciple of Khwāja Mu'īn al-Dīn Chishtī of Ajmer, established his *khānqah* in a small village of Rajputana, he adopted the life of an Indian farmer. Clad in the traditional dress of an Indian peasant — a piece of cloth round his loins, another round his body —, tilling a *bigha* of land and living strictly on a vegetarian diet, he disseminated the teachings of his *silsilah* among the rural population of Rajputana and his *khānqah*, a small mud house, where he explained mystic principles with remarkable lucidity and from where he carried on a vigorous campaign against mystics who hoarded wealth, became the cynosure of the eyes of the people living around him.

## (B) PRINCIPLES OF KHĀNQAH ORGANIZATION

The establishment of *khānqahs* was based on the conviction that a life of solitary, self-sufficient contemplation was incompatible with the highest mystic ideals because it made man ego-centric, limited his sympathies and cut him off completely from the energizing currents of social life. " In constructing

(1) For brief biographical notices, see *Siyar al-Auliyā*, pp. 156-164; *Siyar al-'Ārifīn*, pp. 13-14; *Akhbār al-Akhyār* (Delhi edition, 1309 A.H.), pp. 29-36. The writer of these lines has discovered an unique collection of his conversations, the *Surūr al-Ṣudūr*. It will be published soon.

*khānqahs* ", writes Shaikh ' Izz al-Dīn Maḥmūd, the Persian translator of the famous *'Awārif al-Ma'ārif* of Shaikh Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī, which was accepted by medieval Indian mystics as the best guide book for the organizers of *khānqahs*, " there are several advantages... First it provides shelter for mystics who do not possess any house of their own... Secondly, by gathering at a place and mixing with each other, the mystics get an opportunity of regulating their life and developing uniform inward and outward ways... Thirdly, in this way they get an opportunity of criticising and mending each other's ways ". (1) In fact, when men of different temperaments and attitudes assembled in these *khānqahs*, all tensions, conflicts and complexes in their character were resolved and their personalities were moulded in consonance with the spirit of the *silsilah.* Common penitences and sufferings drew out the noblest qualities of their souls and made them understand what Carlyle calls the ' divine significance of life.'

Shaikh Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī found sanction for the establishment of *khānqahs* in the Quranic verses S. XXIV, 36-37 (2), and laid down the following fundamental principles for the mystics entrusted with the task of organizing *khānqahs* (3):

(i) The people of the *khānqahs* should establish cordial relations with all men *(khalq).*
(ii) They should concern themselves with God, through prayers, meditation, etc.
(iii) They should abandon all efforts at earning a livelihood and should resign themselves to the will of God.
(iv) They should strive for the purification of their inner life.
(v) They should abstain from things that produce evil effects.
(vi) They should learn the value of time.
(vii) They should completely shake off indolence and lethargy.

(1) *Miṣbāḥ al-Hidāyah* (Lucknow edition, 1322 A.H.) pp. 118-119.
(2) *'Awārif al-Ma'ārif* (Urdu translation, Lucknow, 1926), p. 123.
(3) *Ibid.*, pp. 126-127.

The *Ahl-i-Khānqah* (people of a *khānqah)* were divided into two categories: permanent residents *(muqīmān)* and travellers *(musāfirīn)*. A traveller desiring to stay in a *khānqah* was expected to arrive there before the *'aṣr* prayers. If he arrived late, he was advised to pass the night in some mosque and join the *khānqah* the next day. As soon as a guest arrived he was expected to offer two genuflections of prayer and then greet the residents of the *khānqah*. If the visitor decided to stay on after the third day, he had to undertake duties in the *khānqah* and help the inmates in their day-to-day work. The servants of the *khānqah* were instructed to show extreme hospitality to all guests and were strictly warned against ridiculing those who were ignorant of the mystic customs and conventions (1).

The permanent residents of the *khānqah* were divided into three grades: *Ahl-i-Khidmat*, *Ahl-i-Ṣuḥbat* and *Ahl-i-Khalwat*, according to their standing and the nature of duties assigned to them (2).

Strict discipline was maintained in the *khānqahs* and elaborate rules were laid down for the guidance of the inmates: How to talk to the Shaikh; how to deal with visitors; how to sit in the *khānqah;* how to walk; how and when to sleep; what dress to wear—on these and similiar other topics minute instructions were given to the people of the *khānqah* (3). The Shaikh sternly dealt with those inmates who were found guilty of the slightest irregularity (4).

(1) *Miṣbāh al-Hidāyah*, p. 119.

(2) *Ibid.*, pp. 120-121.

(3) Vide Shaikh Najīb al-Dīn 'Abd al-Qāhir Suhrawardī, *Ādāb al-Murīdīn; 'Awārif al-Ma'ārif*, part I, chapters XIII, XIV, XV, XVIII, XX, part II, first ten chapters; *Miṣbāh-al-Hidāyah*, chapters V, VI, VIII. There is hardly any aspect of *khānqah* life on which elaborate instructions are not found in these works.

(4) Only one instance. Shaikh Burhān-al-Dīn Gharīb, a senior disciple of Shaikh Niẓām al-Dīn Auliyā, was in charge of the kitchen in the *khānqah* of the Shaikh. On account of pain in his leg (he was 70 at that time), he folded a blanket and sat leaning on it in front of his visitors. When the Shaikh came to know of it he was deeply annoyed. When Burhān al-Dīn, as usual, came to pay his respect to the Shaikh, the latter did not talk to him. Burhān al-Dīn kissed his master's feet and came down to the *jamā'at khānah*. He had hardly taken his seat when the personal attendant of the Shaikh conveyed to him the Shaikh's order; he was to leave the *khānqah* at once. Overwhelmed with grief he went to the house of

If a *khānqah* had no endowment *(waqf)* for its maintenance, the Shaikh could either instruct his disciples to earn their livelihood or permit them to beg or ask them to sit in the *khānqah* resigned to His will. If a *khānqah* had no Shaikh but was run by a group of men of equal spiritual status *(ikhwān)*, the same three courses were open to them (1).

## (C) THE CHISHTĪ KHĀNQAHS

A Chishtī *khānqah* usually consisted of a big hall *(jamā'at khānah)* where all the inmates lived a community life. The roof of this *jamā'at khānah* was supported by a number of pillars and at the foot of each of these pillars a mystic could be seen with all his belongings—bedding, books and rosary. They all slept on the ground and no discrimination, not even on the basis of piety, was permitted to prevail in the *jamā'at khānah.* If food was available all would partake of it; if not, all would suffer jointly the pangs of hunger. In the *khānqah* of Shaikh Farīd Ganj-i-Shakar, the inmates had to pluck *pēlū* and *dēlah* (2) from the *kareel* trees, fetch water, collect wood from the jungle, and then a saltless dish could be prepared for them (3); but saints who received large amounts of unasked for charity provided better meals for the inmates and visitors of their *khānqahs.*

a disciple of the Shaikh but after two days he requested him to leave his house. A person in disfavour with the Shaikh would not be entertained by anyone else. Burhān al-Dīn went back to his own house, dejected, grief-stricken and morose. Friends tried to console him but the shock of being expelled from the *jamā'at khānah* was too severe for him. Amīr Khusrau represented his case to the Shaikh but failed to secure his pardon. At last Amīr Khusrau appeared before the Shaikh, wrapping his turban round his neck, as criminals do when they give themselves up to justice. The Shaikh was touched by this sight. He asked Khusrau what he wanted. Khusrau requested the Shaikh to forgive Burhān al-Dīn. The Shaikh consented and it was only then that Shaikh Burhān al-Dīn could re-enter the *khānqah.* See *Siyar al-Auliyā*, pp. 278-282.

(1) *Miṣbāh al-Hidāyah*, pp. 121-122.

(2) Wild fruits of thorny plants found in the Punjab and used as food.

(3) *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād*, p. 74; *Khair al-Majālis*, p. 188, 150; *Siyar al-Auliyā*, pp. 86, 209.

No medieval Indian *khānqah* is known to us in such fullness of detail as the *khānqah* of Shaikh Niẓām al-Dīn Auliyā (1). A study of its building and the daily routine of the Shaikh gives a fairly good idea of *khānqah* life in medieval India. In the centre of Shaikh Niẓām al-Dīn's *khānqah* there was a big hall *(jamā'at khānah)* and on both sides of it there were small rooms. In one of these rooms the Shaikh used to retire for his short midday rest. In front of this hall was a large courtyard and an old banyan tree stood in it somewhat away from the centre. The courtyard was surrounded by a veranda, but in order to provide separate rooms for some senior inmates, the parts of the veranda adjoining the hall had been walled up. Opposite to the main hall was the gate-room *(dihlīz)* with a door on either side. This room was large and a few men could sit there comfortably without obstructing the passage of others. Adjoining this *dihlīz* was the kitchen. A small room with wooden walls was built on the roof of the hall and the Shaikh lived in it. A low wall ran round the roof, but on the side of the courtyard the wall had been raised higher to provide shade for the Shaikh and his friends when they sat talking in the morning hours; later on, the banyan tree spread its protecting branches over the roof. Still the shade was not enough for the company and on one occasion we find the Shaikh appealing to his visitors to sit closer so that all may find place in the shade.

The Shaikh had a regular daily programme which he meticulously followed in spite of his indifferent health. He fasted almost continuously. At *iftār* time he left his wooden chamber and came down to the *jamā'at khānah*. A piece of bread with a little vegetable was set before him, to break his fast. He ate only part of it and distributed the rest to his audience. He then offered his *maghrib* prayers in congregation and retired to his room on the upper storey where he granted interviews to

(1) Three books — *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād* of Amīr Ḥasan, *Khair al-Majālis* of Ḥamīd Qalandar and *Siyar al-Auliyā* of Amīr Khurd — taken collectively shed light on almost every aspect of the Shaikh's life, character and teachings. Details of the building of the *khānqah* and the daily programme of the Shaikh are supplied by Amīr Khurd.

visitors till the *'ishā* prayers. Dinner was served upstairs. The Shaikh then came down to offer *'ishā* prayers in congregation, and soon after it returned to his room to spend some time in devotions. Then he sat down on his cot with a rosary in his hand. No disciple except Amīr Khusrau and some children and relations of the Shaikh, could remain with him at this time. When Amīr Khusrau and the children had left, his personal attendant would come, place some vessels in readiness for his ablutions and retire. The Shaikh would then get up and bolt the door. From that time onwards he was alone, busy in meditation and prayers. The inmates of the *khānqah* saw the Shaikh's light burning through the silent hours of the night. An hour before dawn, Khwāja 'Abd al-Raḥīm knocked at the door and presented *saḥrī* (1), but the Shaikh ate very little and when the Khwāja insisted on his taking more, he said with tears in his eyes: " So many poverty-stricken people are sleeping without dinner in the corners of the mosques and in front of the shops. How can this food go down my throat ? " After sunrise the Shaikh would sit on his prayer carpet facing the *qibla* and visitors would come to him in large numbers. Every visitor would bring some present—cloth, cash and other things—which was distributed among those present. At about midday the Shaikh retired to a room adjoining the *jamā'at khānah* for a short rest but even at this time he was occasionally disturbed. After waking up from his short midday sleep, the Shaikh would again attend to his visitors and after the *ẓuhr* prayers he would retire to his room on the roof and visitors would be called there and interviews would go on, with a break for the *'aṣr* prayers, until sunset.

The Chishtī *khānqahs* kept an open kitchen. They quoted the following *ḥadīth* in favour of their practice: " If someone visits a living man and gets nothing from him to eat, it is as if he had visited the dead " (2). A Chishtī mystic would sell

(1) The meal which is taken before the dawn of day to enable one to fast till sunset.

(2) *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād*, p. 136.

his wife's *chādar* or his own prayer carpet but would entertain a visitor to his *khānqah* (1). If nothing at all was available, he would respectfully offer a bowl of water. The visitors would understand that their guest was under extremely straitened circumstances; they would drink water and take leave (2).

The expenses of the *khānqahs* were met from *futūḥ* (3), unasked for charity. Its principle is thus stated by Shaikh Niẓām al-Dīn Auliyā: " A man should not ask for anything with his tongue; nor should he think in his heart that it would be good that a particular individual gave him something. But if without any request or desire on his part a thing comes to him it is lawful (4). " Accumulation of wealth or property was considered to have a demoralizing effect on character - nay, it was deemed to be negation of faith in Gold. Whatever came to a Chishtī *khānqah* in the form of *futūḥ* was immediately distributed among the needy and the poor.

In spite of the large-scale distribution of food, the general atmosphere in the Chishtī *khānqahs* was one of poverty, simplicity and spiritual serenity. The Chishtī saints looked upon *shughl* (Government service) and *jagīrdārī* as fetters that ate into the soul, and so they gave a wide berth to the government of the day (5). Couriers from the court were never welcomed and many a time the rulers were refused interviews. " My house has got two doors, " Shaikh Niẓām al-Dīn Auliyā told the messenger of a Sulṭān who insisted on an interview, " if the Sultan enters by one, I shall make my exit by the other ". (6)

Audition parties *(samā')* were a regular feature of the

(1) *Khair al-Majālis*, p. 75.

(2) *Khair al-Majālis*, p. 75.

(3) For detailed discussions about *futūh*, see *'Awārif al-Ma'ārif*, part I, chapter XX; *Misbāh āl-Hidāyah*, chapter VI, section VII; *Siyar al-Auliyā*, chapter X, section on *futūḥ* and its disbursement.

(4) *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād*, p. 41.

(5) For a detailed discussion of the problem, see the writer's paper: *Early Indo-Muslim Mystics and their Attitude towards the State*, " Islamic Culture ", vols. XXII-XXIV.

(6) *Siyar al-Auliyā*, p. 135.

*khānqahs* (1). The orthodox theologians sharply criticised them on that account, but they never abandoned it. In fact, they considered *samā'* to be their spiritual nourishment.

Whenever a person decided, after being initiated into the discipline, to stay in the *khānqah*, his head was shaved. If a statistical study is made of the types of persons who settled in the *jamā'at khānahs* of the Chishtī saints, it would help us in understanding the social and economic conditions then prevailing in the country. Government servants, business men, scholars and others disgusted with the conditions of the external world sought shelter in the Chishtī *jamā'at khānahs*. A study of the psychological processes through which these persons were given a new twist and cast anew in consonance with the spirit of the *silsilah*, cannot be attempted here.

## (D) THE SUHRAWARDĪ KHĀNQAHS

The Suhrawardī *khānqahs* of Multan were organized on a pattern basically different from that of the *Chishtīs*. The difference arose, firstly, out of the fact that the Suhrawardīs did not eschew politics. They established close personal contact with the rulers and accepted their *jāgīrs*. Instead of depending on the uncertain and irregular income through *futūḥ*, the Suhrawardī *khānqahs* relied on the sure and regular *jāgīr* revenues (2). Secondly, the Suhrawardī *khānqahs* had an aristocratic atmosphere. The *khānqah* of Shaikh Bahā al-Dīn Zakariyyā was a sumptuous affair. It provided separate accommodation both for the inmates and the visitors and was well-furnished. There were granaries, coffers and treasuries in his *khānqah* (3). Thirdly, the Suhrawardīs did not throw their *khānqahs* open to all and sundry. " I have nothing to

(1) For rules regarding *samā'* as followed in the Chishtī *khānqahs*, see *Siyar al-Auliyā*, chapter IX.

(2) Shaikh Rukn al-Dīn Suhrawardī of Multān accepted a *jāgīr* of 100 villages from Sulṭān Muḥammad b. Tughluq (Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Riḥla*, Cairo edition, vol. II, p. 61).

(3) *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād*, pp. 223-224.

do with the general public, " Shaikh Bahā al-Dīn is reported to have said (1), and so he allowed only those to stay and dine with him whom he considered worthy of his attention. His grandson, Shaikh Rukn al-Dīn, never allowed anyone to stay in his *khānqah* unless he had obtained permission from the *Wālī* of Multan. (2) Fourthly, the Suhrawardī *khānqah* of Multan was not open at all times. Shaikh Bahā al-Dīn had fixed hours for interviews and could not be disturbed at any other time. Fifthly, except in the month of Ramaḍān there was very little fasting in his *khānqah* (3). Sixthly, the Suhrawardīs did not believe in audition parties (4).

Besides these *khānqahs* which belonged to the two main mystic orders of the early period, there were many other hospices established by saints who did not belong to any particular spiritual affiliation. Only two of these *khānqahs* may be noticed here, the *khānqah* of Sayyidī Maulā and the *khānqah* of Shaikh Shihāb al-Dīn. The former came from Jurjan and established a magnificient *khānqah* at Delhi. Huge sums of money were spent by him in entertaining people. Delicacies which were beyond the means of *Khāns* and *Maliks* were served at every meal and enormous sums of money were distributed to the poor (5). The *khānqah* of Shaikh Shihāb al-Dīn, a descendant of Shaikh Aḥmad Jām, is thus described by Ibn Baṭṭuṭa: " He dug there a deep cavern in whose cavity he built chambers, granaries, an oven and a bath. He brought water into it from the river Jumna and cultivated that land ". (6) Since those who managed these *khānqahs* were not clear in their minds about the aims and objects of *khānqah* life, they showly drifted into politics and got entangled in serious conflicts with the rulers. The two Shaikhs in question were, in fact, barbarously executed by the Sultans.

(1) *Ibid.*, p. 136.
(2) Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Riḥla*, II, p. 9.
(3) *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād*, p. 184.
(4) *Ibid.*, p. 34. Shaikh Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī has devoted four chapters to a discussion of the various aspects of this problem (*'Awārif al-Ma'ārif*, part I, chapters XXII-XXIV).
(5) For details, see Ḍiyā al-Dīn Baranī, *Tārīkh-i-Fīrūz Shāhī*, pp. 209-212.
(6) *Riḥla*, II, p. 54.

## (E) VISITORS AND THEIR PROBLEMS

All types of people—scholars, politicians, soldiers, Hindu *jogis*, *qalandars*, merchants, etc.—flocked to these *khānqahs*, particularly those of the Chishtīs, and every one of these visitors brought some problem with him. " My brother is ill. " " My officer is harsh to me. " " I am worried about the marriage of my daughters. " " I have a big family but have no means of livelihood ". To attend to these multifarious problems must have put a heavy pressure on the nerves of the Shaikh, but he seldom allowed anybody to leave the *khānqah* unsatisfied. In fact, immediate material solution of all these problems was something beyond the means of the mystics, but with their deep insight into human character they assuaged the wounds of their visitors and gave them that unshakable faith in God and moral values which sustained them in the midst of the severest tribulations of life.

Since a Shaikh was expected to heal both mental and bodily diseases by spiritual means, large crowds assembled in the *khānqahs* for amulets *(ta'wīz)*. Sometimes the Shaikh would put his hand on the sick, sometimes he would breathe on his body, sometimes he would ask him to recite a particular formula, and sometimes he would write the names of God or verses from the Quran on a piece of paper and ask them to carry these amulets on their bodies. People who sought the guidance of a Shaikh in their perilous journey in the realm of spirit were few ; most of the visitors thronged round him for the solution of their worldly problems, through amulets, blessings or recommendations.

## (F) CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF MEDIEVAL INDIAN KHĀNQAHS:

The nature and extent of the influence of these *khānqahs* on medieval Indian society can be assessed with reference to the condition of (i) Hindu society in the 12th century; (ii) the Muslim governing class; and (iii) the general Muslim public.

(i) When the *khānqahs* were established in northern India, Hindu society was passing through one of the darkest phases of its history. The caste-system had eaten into the very vitals of Indian society and had rendered it invertebrate and rickety (1). The workers and artisans — known as *Hadis*, *Domas*, *Chandalas* and *Badhatus* — lived outside the city walls and the idea of theological contamination had assigned to them a sub-human status in the social hierarchy of medieval India. " In fact, " observes al-Bīrūnī, " they are regarded as illegitimate children " and are treated as " outcasts. " All amenities of civic life were denied to them and they were not permitted even to stay in the cities after sunset. No sacred text could be heard or recited by them. They had no access to the temples. A careful analysis of the sites of the *khānqahs* of the early Indo-Muslim mystics would reveal the fact that most of them were established outside the caste-cities in the midst of the lower sections of the Indian population. The unassuming ways of the mystics, their broad human sympathies, the classless atmosphere of their *khānqahs* attracted these despised sections of Indian society to their fold. Here they found an entirely different social order; all discriminations and distinctions which the Hindu society had imposed upon them were meaningless in the *khānqahs*. All lived, slept and ate together. The sacred Book was open and accessible to all. The *khānqahs* thus became the spearheads of Muslim culture and their atmosphere demonstrated the Islamic idea of *tauḥīd* as a working principle in social life. The history of popular religion in Islam, in fact, runs parallel to the growth and expansion of the *khānqah* organization.

Since men belonging to different religions and speaking different languages assembled in the *khānqahs*, it was only natural that a common *lingua franca* was evolved there. The birthplace of the Urdu language was, in fact, the *khānqah* of the medieval *Ṣūfīs*.

(1) For a detailed account of the life and conditions of the people of Hindustan in the 11th century, see al-Bīrūnī, *Kitāb al-Hind* (English translation by Sachau). The account relating to the position of workers in Hindu society is borne out by *Manu*, chapter X, section 51-55.

Besides, the rise of the Bhakti movement in the 14th and the 15th centuries may be traced back to the influence of the *khānqahs*. The fact that the religious leadership of the Bhakti movement came from the lower strata of Hindu society—a section which had been deeply influenced by the Muslim mystics and their khānqah life—is too significant to be ignored. Probably never before in the long history of Hinduism, religious leaders had sprung from those strata of society to which Chaitanya, Kabīr, Nānak, Dhanna, Dadu and others belonged. There was hardly any saint of the Bhakti school who had not passed some of his time in a *khānqah*.

(ii) At a time when the country was resounding with the din and clatter of the arms of the Ghūrids, the atmosphere of the *khānqahs* acted as a corrective to the political hysteria of the period. The saints sat cool and collected in their *khānqahs* and taught lessons of human love and equality. While the Turkish governing class made hideous distinctions between Turks and Non-Turks, between nobles and low-born persons, the *khānqahs* held aloft the Islamic ideals of equality and fraternity. Balban might refuse to talk to low-born persons in his court, he could dismiss them if he so wished, but when he visited the *khānqah* of Shaikh Farīd Ganj-i-Shakar at Ajodhan he must have realized that there were places in the Empire of Hindustan where his own position was not more exalted than that of any ordinary human being. I may be permitted to repeat what I have said elsewhere about the *khānqah* of Shaikh Farīd: " Though situated within the political confines of the Sultanate of Delhi, the *jamā'at khānah* of Shaikh Farīd was not part of the Delhi Empire. It was, at that time, the only place under the Indian sun where the Emperor of Hindustan and a penniless pauper were received in the same way. The contamination of court life had not touched its spiritual serenity and classless atmosphere. It was an oasis of love in a world of strifes and conflicts. " (1)

(iii) The Urban Revolution which had come in the wake of the establishment of Turkish power in India, had brought

(1) *The Life and Times of Shaikh Farīd Ganj-i-Shakar*, p. 114.

with it certain moral laxities and social vices, a necessary concomitant of culture-growth. A cursory glance through the pages of the *Qirān al-Sa'dain* of Amīr Khusrau and the *Tārīkh-i-Fīrūz Shāhī* of Ḍiyā al-Dīn Baranī gives an idea of the atmosphere that prevailed in Delhi after the death of Balban and before the advent of 'Alā al-Dīn Khaljī. The *khānqahs* acted as a counterweight in maintaining the moral equilibrium of the medieval society. The following contemporary account of the *khānqah* of Shaikh Niẓām al-Dīn Auliyā will give some idea of their influence on the life of the people:

"Shaikh Niẓām al-Dīn had opened wide the doors of his discipleship, admitting people to his discipline, confessing sinners, and pervading with religious habits all classes of men—nobles and commoners, rich and poor, learned and ignorant, citizens and villagers, soldiers and warriors, free men and slaves; and these persons refrained from many improper acts because they considered themselves disciples of the Shaikh; if any one of them committed a sin, he confessed and vowed allegiance anew. The general public showed an inclination to religion and prayer; men and women, young and old, shop-keepers and servants, children and slaves, all came to say their prayers. Most of those who frequented the Shaikh's company regularly said their *chāsht* and *ishrāq* prayers (1). Many platforms with thatched roofs were constructed on the way from the city to Ghiyāthpur (where the Shaikh had established his *khānqah*), wells were dug, water-vessels were kept, carpets were spread, and a servant and a *ḥāfiẓ* were stationed at every platform so that people going to the Shaikh should have no difficulty in saying their prayers on the way. And on every platform a crowd of men could be seen saying their superorgatory *(nafl)* prayers. Owing to regard for the Shaikh's discipleship all talk of sinful acts had disappeared from the people. There were no topics of conversation among most people except

(1) In addition to the five compulsory *(farḍ)* prayers, the Muslims have five recommended (or *sunnat*) prayers—*ishrāq*, after sunrise, *chāsht* in the forenoon, *zawāl* after midday, *awābīn* at twilight and *tahajjud* between midnight and early dawn. All other prayers belong to a third category of *nafl* or superorgatory prayers.

inquiries about the prayers of *chāsht* and *tahajjud*. How many genuflections *(rak'ats)* did they contain ? What *Sura* of the Quran was to be recited with each genuflection ? What *du'ās* (religious formulae) were to follow each prayer ? How many *rak'ats* did the Shaikh say every night; and what part of the Qurān in every *rak'at* and what *daruds* (blessings on the Prophet) ? What was the custom of Shaikh Farīd and of Shaikh Bakhtiyār ? Such were the questions asked by the new disciples of the old. They inquired about fasting and prayers and about reducing their food. Many persons took to committing the Quran to memory. The new disciples of the Shaikh were committed to the charge of the old. The older disciples had no other occupation but prayer and worship, aloofness from the world, and the study of books and of the lives of the saints. God forbid that they should ever talk or hear about worldly affairs or turn towards the house of a worldly man, for such things they considered to be entirely sinful and wrong. Perseverance in *nafl* prayers alone had gone to such an extent that at the Sultan's court many amirs, clerks, guards and royal slaves had become the Shaikh's disciples, said their *chāsht* and *ishrāq* prayers and fasted on the 13th and 16th of every month, as well as during the first ten days of *Zul-ḥijja*. There was no quarter of the city in which a gathering of the pious was not held every month or every twenty days with mystic songs that moved them to tears. Many disciples of the Shaikh finished the *tarāwīḥ* (1) prayers in their houses or in the mosques. Such of them as were more persevering passed the whole night standing in prayer throughout Ramaḍān, on Fridays and during the days of the Hajj. The elder disciples stood in prayers for a third or three fourths of the night throughout the year, while others said their morning prayers with the ablution of their *'Ishā* prayer (2). Some of his disciples finally reached eminence in spiritual power through his education.

" Owing to the influence of the Shaikh, most of the Muslims

(1) Prayers in Ramaḍān between sunset and *'Ishā*.
(2) I.e. they did not sleep but spent the whole night in prayer.

of this country took an inclination towards mysticism, prayers and aloofness from the world, and came to have faith in the Shaikh. This faith was shared by 'Alā al-Dīn and his family. The hearts of men having become virtuous by good deeds, the very name of wine, gambling and other forbidden things never came to anybody's lips. Sins and abominable vices appeared to people as bad as infidelity. Muslims out of regard for one another refrained from open usury and monopolistic practices *(iḥtikār)*, while the shop-keepers, from fear, gave up speaking lies, using false weights and deceiving the ignorant. Most of the scholars and learned men, who frequented the Shaikh's company, applied themselves to books on devotion and mysticism. The *Qūt al-Qulūb*, the *Iḥyā al-'Ulum* and its translation, the *'Awārif*, the *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, the *Sharḥ-i-Ta'arruf*, the *Risālah-i-Qushairī*, the *Mirṣād al-'Ibād*, the *Maktūbāt-i-'Ain al-Quḍāt*, and the *Lawā'iḥ* and the *Lawāmi'* of Qāḍī Ḥamīd al-Dīn Nāgaurī found many purchasers, as also did the *Fawā'id-al-Fu'ād* of Amīr Ḥasan, on account of the sayings of the Shaikh which it contains. People asked the booksellers about books on devotion. " (1)

## (G) THE DESTRUCTION OF KHĀNQAH LIFE IN MEDIEVAL INDIA

The responsibility for destroying *khānqah* life and organization of medieval India lies on the shoulders of Sultan Muḥammad b. Tughluq (1325-1351). First, acting on the maxim: " State and Religion are twins, " (2) he asked the mystics to leave their *khānqahs* and to accept government service. Elder saints like Shaikh Naṣīr al-Dīn Chirāgh of Delhi and Shaikh Quṭb al-Dīn Munawwar of Hānsī, refused to fall in with the policy of the Sultan and declined, at the risk of their lives, to leave their *khānqahs;* but a generation of promising young mystics, who were expected to continue the early traditions and to keep the

(1) *Tārīkh-i-Fīrūz Shāhī*, pp. 343-345.
(2) *Siyar al-Auliyā*, p. 196.

torch burning, was completely spoiled. Secondly, the migration of the Muslim population from Delhi to Deogīr turned the *khānqahs* into wilderness. So complete was the destruction of *khānqah* life in Delhi that, with the exception of the tombs of Shaikh Quṭb al-Dīn Bakhtiyār Kākī and Shaikh Niẓām al-Dīn Auliyā, no tomb or hospice in Delhi had even a candle lamp. (1) Thirdly, the Sultan had probably come under the influence of the teachings of Ibn Taimiyya (2) (ob. 1328), who was a bitter critic of *khānqah* life and regarded the *khānqahs* as thoroughly un-Islamic. Whatever the motives, the result of Muḥammad b. Tughluq's policy was that the traditions of the early medieval *khānqahs* were killed. When the Sultanate broke up into provincial dynasties, *khānqahs* were, no doubt, established in provincial towns, but these provincial *khānqahs* differed from the earlier ones in their ideals, attitudes and principles of organization.

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(1) *Jawāmi' al-Kilam* (MS).

(2) For the visit of one of his disciples to the court of Muḥammad b. Tughluq, see Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Riḥla*, II, p. 44.