

Charity in Medieval Sufi Islam: Spiritual Dimensions

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ABSTRACT

The Early Chishti Sufi Shaikhs from thirteenth and fourteenth century Delhi made critical interventions in the religious lives of the Muslims in South Asia. They cultivated in their adherents the much-needed ethical vision and sensitivity towards the socially marginalized. Yet hardly any attention is paid to the pedagogy of these Sufis on religion and spirituality. Their discourses on their community are documented in their literary works like malfūzāt. Of late, malfūzāt have been studied as a literary genre for the unique processes of their making. But their didactic contents on Islam and their instructions to Sufi initiates have barely been examined. This lacuna stems on account of the usage of these religious texts as fillers for information lacking in court chronicles. The essay studies the pedagogy of the Early Chishtī Shaikhs and as they related to charity in medieval South Asia. It also examines the mechanisms deployed by them to cultivate a philanthropic vision in Muslims in the praxis of faith.

1. Introduction

Islamic belief plays a vital role in cultivating the virtue of charity in its followers. It is not surprising, therefore, that the third of the five basic tenets of Islam is the obligation to give alms.² Several verses of the *Qur'ān* enjoin its followers with the means to give yearly mandatory alms (*zakāt*) and do voluntary charity (*sadaqa*) (*Qur'ān* 7:156; 9:60; 19:31; 30:39 and 41:17, Oxford World's Classics edition). Prophet Muhammad, to whom the *Qur'ān* was revealed, inspired his followers to give alms in many of his sayings (*ahadīs*). He lived an ascetic life-giving preference to the needs of the others; consequently, his practices (*sunnah*), too, became examples for the community to emulate. After the Prophet, the Sufi Shaikhs served as a crucial agency in making the Muslim community aware of the injunctions of the Islamic faith (*sharī'a*). In South Asia, the positive intervention of the Sufis in the religious lives of the Muslims can be best studied through the didactics of the Chishtī Sufi Shaikhs, which were addressed to their followers. Contrary to general belief, the Shaikhs were not mere recluses but spent a considerable part of their time with the community. The Chishtīyyas, since their establishment in the thirteenth century, provided the much-needed ethical vision to their followers in observance of faith. It is manifest particularly in their pedagogy pertaining to charity.

1.1 Agency of the Sufis in the religious life of the community

There is a general misconception that Islamic tenets and beliefs are lucidly laid down in black and white in the *Qur'ān*, the sayings (*ahadīs*) and practices of the Prophet (*sunnah*). Such conceptions presume that there is little to be explained to its followers, and a couple of historical circumstances make them untenable. Firstly, these sources of *sharī'a* (Islamic religious injunctions), were largely in Arabic in the initial years of the foundations of Islam and were not understood by followers in regions where people had no knowledge of this language. Secondly, the philology of the *Qur'ān* is quite metaphorical (Qalandar, 1959, pp. 4-5). Alī ibn Abī Tālib acknowledged the allegorical nature of the *Qur'ān* in one of his sayings that each verse of *Qur'ān* has four levels of meaning.³ First is exoteric (*zāhir*), the other is esoteric *bātin*. The third is the limit (*hadd*), which comprises the

² The first pillar of the Islamic faith is the profession of the belief that there is no God but God and Prophet Mohammed is His messenger (*shahāda*). The second is the obligation to pray five times daily and third as mentioned above is the obligation to give mandatory alms yearly (*zakāt*). The fourth enjoins Muslims to observe fasts (*sawm*) during the month of Ramazan and the fifth is that every Muslim who is healthy and has the means should go for the pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*). .

³ Thenceforth he will be referred to Alī in the essay.

statutes of the licit and the illicit. The fourth is the divine project that God intends to realise with the humankind (*matla'*) (Elias, 2010).

The *Qur'ān* requires expert training to interpret these varied layers of meanings. Consequently, abundant commentaries were written to make the *Qur'ān* intelligible for following leading to the rise of a genre of literature called *tafsīr*.⁴

Since the inception of Islam, Sufis, too, have contributed to *tafsīr* writings, along with numerous scholars of Islamic religion and theology (Tareen, 2020, pp. 233-35). In fourteenth-century Delhi, the Chishti Sufi Shaikh Nasīr al-Dīn Chirāgh Dillī (d.1356) in his discourses cited and explained umpteen *Qur'ānic* verses at length. His disciple Gesū Darāz' (d.1422) built on his master's work in his commentary on the *Qur'ān* (*tafsīr*), which can be found in the compilation, the *Multaqat* (Tareen, 2020). These Shaikhs had addressed exegesis of the *Qur'ān* to their audience, who gathered around them to seek religious and spiritual guidance (Husainī, 1956).⁵ Literacy and education have always been a privilege of a few Muslims. Even most of the educated ones, too, did not have the time or the requisite skills to fully fathom the sacred scripture. In such a scenario, the Sufi Shaikhs exerted a pervasive influence on the religious and spiritual life of the people in medieval Islamicate societies.

1.2 Social interactions of the Early Chishtī Shaikhs

The Early Chishtī Shaikhs, from thirteenth and fourteenth century Delhi, Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā' (d.1325), his successor disciple Nasīr al-Dīn Chirāgh Dillī (d.1356) and Gesū Darāz(d.1422) guided people who gathered in their hospice (*khānqāh*) on a regular basis about Islam, its praxis and its spiritual dimensions (Eaton, 2005, pp. 33-48).⁶ They also encouraged their adherents to turn to religion for solace and solutions to numerous travails of their lives. While explicating the finer nuances of Islamic tenets, the Shaikhs did not carry on a monologue, but they interacted with the audience and responded to their doubts and queries. This interactive mode permitted the Sufis to tune their preaching in response to the sort of audience they were addressing and the space and time they were located (Khan, 2016). They used anecdotes and examples from everyday life to simplify their interpretations of *sharī'a* and communicate their message effectively. Their interactive pedagogic method of addressing the audience is to be found in the genre of literature called *mal'fūzāt*, which were initially compiled ubiquitously around the fourteenth century. These texts are collations of the discourses of the Sufi Shaikhs addressed to their congregations and were compiled by proximate disciples who participated in the gatherings of the Shaikhs.

The *mal'fūzāt* best reveal the nature of the role that these Spiritual masters performed in the religious and spiritual life of the Muslim community (Khan, 2016). In spite of the considerable influence exerted by the Chishtiyyas in guiding the religious and spiritual lives of Muslims in South Asia, they have received scant attention in scholarly circles. Readings of their literary texts have largely been confined to considering either their ecumenical message of universal brotherhood or to exemplify their asceticism (Habib, 1970, pp.6-9; Nizami, 1991a; Nizami 1991b).

2. Objective of the paper

In South Asia, the Chishtī strand of Sufism/*tasawwuf* held sway amongst the populace since its establishment and continues to do presently. To my mind, it is imperative to examine how the Early Chishtī Shaikhs interpreted the injunctions of *sharī'a* and made it attractive to inspire and motivate people to follow them. This paper analyses the preaching of the Chishti Shaikhs of Delhi in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and how they related to charity. The paper will devote specific attention to the narrative devices and rhetorical mechanisms employed by the Shaikhs to make people conscious of their religious obligations to do charity and to reach out to the needy voluntarily in their everyday lives. This paper shall demonstrate that most Sufi Shaikhs interpreted the injunctions of *sharī'a* far beyond the narrow juridical perspective in which they are usually understood. Instead, the Shaikhs laced their interpretations with rewards and incentives to motivate people to observe those. Further, the essay indicates how the Chishtī Sufi Shaikhs were instrumental in providing an ethical vision to their community. They instructed their adherents to dispense their religious obligations not only by worshipping God but by serving society as well. To my mind, the critical function of the Early Chishtī Sufis as religious leaders of the Muslim community can be best examined by a study of their discourses on the tenets of faith pertaining to charity.

⁴ Tafsīr is commentary or an interpretation of the *Qur'ān*

⁵ In this *mal'fūz* the compiler has often given an account of Nasīr al-Dīn Mahmūd explaining to his gatherings the meaning of the Quranic verses and sayings of the Prophet. The mode in which the Shaikh cited the *Qur'ānic* verses and then explained them clearly demonstrates that most literate people too could not fathom the verses of the scripture for themselves. At times some learned audience came with doubts and queries pertaining to some Quranic verses and as well as prophetic traditions to the Shaikh for explanation. Gesū Darāz too though not as frequently as his spiritual mentor(Nasīr al-Dīn) cited and explained Quranic verses and sayings of the prophet while preaching people about Islam, spirituality and praxis.

⁶ Shaikhs Nizām al-Dīn and Nasīr al-Dīn lived and preached in Delhi and lie buried here. Gesū Darāz, the successor disciple of Nasīr al-Dīn, left Delhi in 1398 in the wake of Mongol invasions and travelling through western India settled in Gulbarga and lies buried there.

The essay deliberates on the objects and modes of instruction preferred by the Chishti Shaikhs in addressing their followers about the religious duty to give *zakāt* and *sadaqa*. To my mind, it is imperative to scrutinize such aspects of the didactics of the Chishtī Shaikhs as Islam is not solely about ritualistic prayer, pilgrimage but also about a believer's social obligations. The Chishtī *tariqa* (*silsilah*), since its inception in South Asia, engaged with their community to help them become better Muslims.

2.1 The Chishtī approach to devotion

Nizam al-Din Awliyā in his interactions with his congregation indicated that a Muslim's religious obligations were dual in nature; towards God and his people. The duty towards the divine entailed offering obligatory prayers (*namāz*), observations of the fasts of the months of Ramadan (*sawm*), pilgrimage (*hajj*), *aurād* (plural of *wird*) and recital of the rosary (*tasbihāt*) (Steingass, 1992).⁷ Devotion to the divine was mandatory for every Muslim and was deemed as accepted only when it was done with pure intention and its benefits accrued exclusively to the individual devotee. The other obligation was one of supererogatory devotion, which entailed kindness, compassion and generosity towards fellow beings. It brought happiness and comfort to others and its rewards were limitless and its divine acceptance was also unconditional (Sijzi, 1990, p.226). With a perception of this sort, the Chishtī Shaikhs' interpretation of the religious obligations to do *hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca) and *zakāt* focused on helping fellow beings and not just ritualistic observance of these tenets. I will be taking up their discussion on these themes later in the essay.⁸

2.2 Malfūzāt: Didactics Fonts of the Chishtī Shaikhs

While Mu'in al-Din Chishtī (d.1235) laid the foundations of the Chishtī *tariqa/silsilah* in the 13th century, there is little to no contemporaneous literature from that period. It is only from the time of Nizām al-Dīn that literary texts in the genre of *malfūzāt* (plural/*malfūz* singular) and *tazkirāt* (plural/*tazkira* singular) were rendered in the circle of the Chishtiyas. The *malfūzāt* are the oral discourses of the Chishtī Shaikhs addressed to their gatherings; the *tazkirāt* are biographies of Sufi Shaikhs (Lawrence, 2002). The essay discusses the preaching of the Chishtiyas of the thirteenth and fourteenth century Delhi related to charity primarily from their *malfūzāt*. Amīr Hasan Sijzi, a poet and a learned disciple of Shaikh Nizām al-Dīn penned his *malfūz- Fawā'id al-Fu'ād* - between the years (1307-22). Nasir al-Dīn Mahmūd's *malfūz- Khair al-Majālis*-was compiled by his disciple Hamid Qalandar over the years 1354-56. *Jawami' al-Kalim*- the oral discourses of Gesū Darāz was gathered by his oldest son and disciple in the year (1399-1400). I have taken up their preaching pertaining to charity as recorded in these texts to demonstrate the manner in which the Chishtī Shaikhs gave primacy to making Muslims aware of their duties and obligations towards the poor and needy in the society.

2.3 Approach of the Shaikhs towards *sharī'a*

Shaikh Nizām al-Dīn, when preaching to people who gathered around him informed them of their religious duties and encouraged them to observe the same fastidiously. The Shaikh preached that Islamic tenets were far easier to follow in their times when compared to the period prior to Prophet Muhammad. For instance, the Shaikh informed his listeners that before the Prophet, it was mandatory to offer the obligatory prayers in a mosque and give 1/4th *zakāt* (the mandatory alms) on one's wealth annually. It was only after Prophet Muhammad's intervention on their behalf with God that Muslims were obligated to part with only 1/40th of their possessions as *zakat* (Sijzi, 1990, p.177). It seems that Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā emphasized these divine concessions provided to Muslims to communicate the mercy and munificence of God towards the followers of Islam with regard to their obligatory observances. The Shaikh had thus framed *zakat* as an opportunity for Muslims to be grateful to God for his magnanimity. Through the narrative device of alluding to the Prophet's intervention, the Shaikh exhorted his followers to please God by excelling in observance of his lenient commands. Consequently, it can be argued that Nizām al-Dīn and his successor-disciples Nasir al-Dīn Mahmūd and Gesū Darāz did not believe in the following religion with an exoteric understanding that is in an external way. These Shaikhs involved their inner self (*bātin*) or, to be more precise, their heart (*qalb*) in interpreting the religious tenets for adherence. That is to say that they comprehended and preached Islam with spiritual insights and recommended superior ways of conforming to Islamic faith in order to become "extraordinary believers" and "seekers" of God rather than just remain ordinary Muslims (Ernst & Lawrence, 2002, pp. 11-26).

As a result, while instructing followers about the tenets of Islam for observation, they emphasized offering several supererogatory prayers (*nafl namāz*) apart from the basic five times obligatory *namāz*. Similarly, they recommended that to progress on the path of God one should fast not only for a month in *Ramādān* but observe fasts for four months in a year (Sijzi, 1990, pp. 32-33). Similarly, their preaching on the obligations to give alms (*zakāt*) and pilgrimage (*hajj*) was not limited to merely observing them in accordance with the conditions laid by *sharī'a* (Islamic injunctions). They expanded the *sharī'a* for praxis but were cautious to never deviate from it under any circumstance. Further, they were concerned about their followers realising that

⁷ *Aurād* are recital of the portions of the Qur'an recited at different hours..

⁸ The obligation to do *hajj* is only for the Muslims with means. It is manifest from the injunctions of *sharī'a* related to it. A Muslim can go for the pilgrimage only with their earnings and before setting out s/he has to provide for his family. The Chishtī Sufis were aware of the fact that numerous poor Muslims also desired to go for pilgrimage to Mecca but could not afford it. They emphasized in their preaching that it was more important to have the right intentions for *hajj* than just performing it as a ritual. d to do the pilgrimage but could not afford it.

these divine commands should be observed in a manner that was worthy of divine acceptance as well. The Shaikhs emphasized that it was not only enough to go for *hajj* with earnings acquired with honest means and with provisions for the journey. It was more important to set out with righteous intentions and with absolute trust in God (Sijzi, 1990, pp.149-151).

3. Didactic of the Chishtiyya on Charity

3.1 Annual mandatory (*zakāt*)

The didactics of the Chishtiyyas on charity enjoined Muslims to donate far beyond what was stipulated by *sharī'a*. The Chishti Shaikhs instructed their community that they should constantly strive to transcend the basic obligations of faith and the limits of *sharī'a* in adhering to religious tenets, especially while doing charity. On account of his vision to turn ordinary believers into "extraordinary seekers of God," Nizām al-Dīn explicated the divine commands to give annual alms (*zakāt*), underscoring that a believer should expend much beyond the prescribed amount on the path of God. He expounded that doling out merely 2½ percent of one's wealth yearly as *zakāt* enjoined by *sharī'a* neither makes a person generous nor a miser. However, if a person retains only 2½ percent for himself and gives away all his riches, he is certainly generous and such people are to be found amongst those who follow the mystic path (*tariqat*). Those who are on the path of the truth (*haqiqat*), are most proximate to the divine and have the intuition to see beyond the physical realm. They keep nothing for themselves but give away all as they have *tawakkul* (trust) in God. The reward of such disbursement of *zakāt* ensures that God will take care of their needs as He is their provider and such givers of *zakāt* are definitely magnanimous (Sijzi, 1990, pp.177-178).

Additionally, Nizām al-Dīn moved beyond the *shariatic* conception of paying *zakāt* solely on material possessions. The Shaikh considered knowledge a non-material possession, as riches, and instructed that the scholars of religion should pay *zakāt* on their intellectual attainments as well. He enjoined that one should practice at least 2½ percent of the sayings of the Prophet (*ahadīs*) that one learns. Unmistakably, the emphasis of the Shaikhs was on making the community aware of the sayings and exemplary acts of the Prophet, as he was the sole recipient and source of the divine revelations. Their recommendation of *zakāt* on knowledge for the religious scholars was aimed at creating a learned religious class, which not only preached but practiced what they learned - to become exemplars of faith for people to emulate. The multiple layered interpretations of the obligation to give *zakāt* was meant to cater to different degrees of piety that people wished to attain.

Nevertheless, in guiding Muslims to pay *zakāt* in the above manner, the Shaikh was cautious in underlining that he was not indulging in any innovation in religion but was merely reiterating what earlier Sufis like Junaid Baghdadi had expressed about the religious-scholarly elite with regard to paying *zakāt* (Sijzi, 1990, p. 178). Rooting his own preaching in *sharī'a* or presenting it as backed by tradition -as was the case here- helped legitimize the stature and functions of the Sufi Shaikhs as standard-bearers of the legacy of Islamic traditions (Green, 2012, pp. 2-6). Further such claims to authority thwarted any possible opposition to their teaching from orthodox sections of society.

Nasir a-Dīn Mahmūd while discussing *zakāt* dealt with practical aspects that one could encounter while dispensing that obligation. *Sharī'a* required that *zakāt* was to be given on the wealth which one possessed for a year. It also specified that if one has wealth at the beginning of the year but loses it in the middle of the year only to reacquire it by the end of that year; in that instance the Shaikh advised that on such wealth too one has to pay *zakāt* (Qalandar, 1959, p.255). On *zakāt*, he narrated the instance of Khwaja Khujandi, a devout cloth merchant from Delhi who had memorized the *Qur'an*. Despite being affluent, he traded in coarse cloth worn by *darweshes*. Once while his bales of cloth were being placed on the banks of river Yamuna from his boat, one of those fell in the waters. The bale could not be located even after frenetic searches and was a source of anxiety for everyone save the Khwaja, who remained unperturbed. The Khwaja firmly believed that his goods were secure since he was particular about giving the yearly alms and he was vindicated in his beliefs when they did find the lost bundle on their return journey (Khan, 2016, p.183).

Shaikh Nasir al-Dīn Mahmūd seemingly invokes the case of Khwaja Khujandi as a didactic device on mandatory alms to address merchants present in his gatherings. His choice of addressing merchants seems motivated by two distinct but related reasons. One, since the merchant had the means, hence *zakāt* was mandatory for them and the other was that they seemed to be the major defaulters. That is why the Shaikhs was trying to convince them about the benefits of being conscientious about giving compulsory alms (Khan, 2016). On that count, the Shaikh communicated through Khwaja Khujandi's episode that if one pays the alms then one's possessions remained protected from loss and damage, as a sort of divine insurance. Gesū Darāz, in contradistinction, emphasized a social welfare dimension to *zakāt* when he indicated that the provision of *zakāt* in Islam was made to provide for the needs of the poor (Husaini, 1956, p.324).

3.2 Voluntary Charity (*sadaqa*)

The Shaikhs further instructed that apart from obligatory *zakāt* one should give voluntary alms (*sadaqa*) with sincerity and inspired by the love for the Prophet. Shaikh Nizām al-Dīn exemplified the first Caliph, Abu Bakr Siddique, as the most generous

giver of alms and asked his followers to emulate his example while doing charity. He further tried to motivate people to do charity by citing how Abu Bakr Siddique was rewarded for his magnanimity (Sijzi, 1990, pp. 61-62).⁹ Through such examples, the Shaikhs wished to motivate people to practice religious tenets and it can be argued that they were not content in merely informing their followers of those tenets. Consequently the Shaikhs clarified the mode and manner in which alms should be donated. They specified that alms must be given from income earned honestly; they must be given to the deserving with good intention, magnanimity and without delay; alms should not become occasions or instances for one to exhibit and boast of one's charitable acts.

3.2.1 Sadaqa al-Fitr

Shaikh Nizām al-Dīn instructed his disciples that they should donate *sadaqa al-Fitr* which is given on the day of *Eid al-Fitr* as it is necessary for acceptance of one's fasts of the month of *Ramadan*. The Shaikh informed his listeners that this charity is compulsory for every Muslim whose income exceeds their basic needs. It has to be disbursed for every member and dependent in the family, including servants and slaves. It can be disbursed both in cash or grain. These alms are not mentioned in the *Qur'an* but it is based on the saying (*hadīs*) and practice (*sunnah*) of Prophet Muhammad. The Shaikh also conveyed to his audience that he himself gave *sadaqa al-Fitr* (Sijzi, 1990, pp. 238-39). Actually, this mode of charity has a larger social purpose as it ensures that even the poorest from the community could participate in the feasting that is customary after observing a month long fast of *Ramadan*.

3.2.2 Instructions of the Shaikhs on modes of doing voluntary charity

Nasīr al-Dīn Mahmūd who succeeded his spiritual mentor Shaikh Nizām al-Dīn, made his followers aware about the voluntary charity by citing *Qur'ānic* verses and episodes associated with the revelation of those sections. For instance, he discussed the *Qur'ānic* Verse 9:60,

“Charities are only for the poor and needy, and workers who administer them, and those whose hearts have been reconciled, and those in bondage and those in debt and on the cause of God: and for the wayfarer as the co-ordinate of God. And God is omniscient and most wise.” (Cleary, 2004).

The Shaikh explained the above tenet of *sharī'a* by going beyond the literal meaning of the verse. He indicated that alms are given to the poor and the needy to satiate their hunger but freeing a slave from bondage amounts to giving life to her/ him - as slavery is akin to death. Thus the Shaikh underscored that one should prefer setting a slave free over giving alms. This is not surprising as in the 13th and 14th centuries, slavery was extremely prevalent in South Asia. The Delhi Sultans not only recruited slaves in their army but both men and women were used as domestic slaves (Kumar, 1994). The domestic slaves were ill-treated is manifest from the instructions that Nasīr al-Dīn Mahmūd gave to a woman after initiating her as his disciple. He advised her not to beat up slaves and maids instead, she should be kind to them.

Nizām al-Dīn, on the other hand, motivated his disciples to set slaves free. In one of his gatherings, the compiler of *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād*, Amīr Hasan Sijzi emancipated his slave Malih and gifted him to the Shaikh out of gratefulness for having initiated him in the Chishtī fold. On Malih's request, Nizām al-Dīn conferred discipleship on him as well. Then the Shaikh informed his audience that slavery was not an impediment on the mystic path. All that mattered was sincerity. He reiterated it by narrating an anecdote of a Sūfi Shaikh of Ghaznīn who had passed on his spiritual mantle to his slave Zīrak superseding the claims of his own four sons (Sijzi, 1990, pp. 5-6).

In another congregation of the Shaikh, Amīr Hasan brought one of his slaves called Bashīr who was devout and passionately desired to become the disciple of Shaikh Nizām al-Dīn. The Shaikh initiated Bashīr and then sent him to offer two cycles of prayer (*namāz*). When Bashīr went to pray, Nizām al-Dīn narrated a tale of a *darwesh* who initiated one of his slaves and placed the Sufi cap (*kulāh*) on him, saying that it is the cap of Saiyyidi Ahmedi. After some time, the *darwesh* was lured into selling that slave on being offered a high prize in the slave market of Ghaznīn. The slave pleaded tearfully with his master and asked him how he could sell him after placing the *kulāh* (cap) of Saiyyadi Ahmadi on him. The *darwesh* probably belonged to that family and realized that he could not sell him as he had initiated his slave in his spiritual genealogy. Consequently, the *darwesh* freed the man. Moved by the tale, Amīr Hasan liberated his slave Bashīr as well. Nizām al-Dīn narrated the tale on that occasion to inspire Amīr Hasan to emancipate his slave. The impact of the Shaikh's preaching had such a profound influence on Amīr Hasan

⁹ The Shaikh narrated that Abu Bakr (the first caliph) gave all that he had in charity to Prophet Muhammad. The Prophet asked him whether he had kept something for his family. Abu Bakr replied that he had brought everything for the Prophet entrusting his family in the care of God and the Prophet. God rewarded Abu Bakr's charity by asking people to dress in the manner of Abu Bakr in a blanket tied together with a nail.

that when he was on a military campaign in Daulatabad, he bought a small-enslaved girl from her master only to emancipate her and reunite her with her parents (Sijzi, 1990, pp. 191-93).

Nasir al-Dīn Mahmūd preached to his audience that money set aside for *hajj* was better used if deployed to the aid of a starving neighbour. He preached that such aid afforded greater assurance of one's *hajj* being accepted by God than through actual performance of the pilgrimage. He narrated the tale of Ali Muaqaff –a cobbler from Egypt, to illustrate his claim. Ali Muaqaff saved money for years for the pilgrimage, then one day, on finding his neighbour's wife feeding on a carcass after days of starvation - he gave the starving couple his savings meant for his *hajj*. A pious man who was meditating in the Ka'ba after his pilgrimage heard angels converse that in that particular year, only Ali Mauqaf's *hajj* was accepted on account of the blessing of his charitable act. The pilgrimage of the others too was acknowledged on account of Alī Mauqaf's act. The Shaikh conveyed to his audience that what mattered was sincere intentions to do *hajj* and even an act of charity with the money saved for the pilgrimage could lead to the fulfilment of that obligation and its recognition by God (Qalandar, 1959, pp. 215-16).

Shaikh Nasir al-Dīn quoted portions from the *Qurānic* verse of 59:9, " ... (They) preferring them to themselves even if it means hardships for themselves,"¹⁰ He then narrated the occurrence relating to the revelation of this verse (*asbāb al-nuzūl*). Once on the Prophet's recommendation, Fatima -the daughter of Prophet Muhammad, his son-in-law Alī, and their maid Fizza, fasted for three days as an offering to God for the good health of their progeny Hassan and Husain. Alī, Fatima and Fizza had already faced three days of starvation prior to undertaking the fast. On all three days, at the time of breaking bread in the evening, needy people had knocked on their door for food. On the first day, it was a poor, hungry man; it was an orphan on the second day; and on the third day, a slave. Alī, Fatima and Fizza gave their meals to them and remained hungry on those days. The above verse was revealed in the honour of their act of charity. This was an example of an exceptional case of voluntary charity where the family of the prophet ignored their own hunger to feed those who were starving Qalandar, 1959, pp. 165-66; Quran 5:69). Their maid Fizza was rewarded for joining their masters in their act of charity by her mention in the *Qur'ān* (Qalandar, 1959, p. 167). The Shaikhs narrated such incidents to communicate to their audience that it is not only important to be charitable but also to prioritize the needs of others over and above one's own.

Nasir al-Dīn Mahmūd mentioned that Abu Hurairah, one of the proximate companions of the Prophet had narrated yet another incident, which related to the revelation of Q.V. 59:9. Once Prophet Muhammad had a guest. Since there was no food in his house, the Prophet enquired among his friends to ascertain who would host his guest for him. One of the Ansars (those who helped the prophet after his flight from Mecca to Medina) acquiesced to the Prophet's request, took the guest to his place, and asked his wife to serve him dinner. There was just enough food for the Ansar couple and their children. The wife put the children to sleep hungry and served the food to the visitor. The wife put off the light, to make the guest believe that they were partaking food with him. Actually, the couple was just feeding the guest, choosing to go hungry themselves as the food was just sufficient for the guest (Qalandar, 1959, p. 167).

Shaikh Nasir al-Dīn's purpose in citing the above verse was to communicate the following message to his audience: One should respond immediately to assist the needy. While doing that, one should give preference to the needs of the other over one's own. Nasir al-Dīn Mahmūd reiterated the above message through another anecdote related to the revelation of the Quranic verse 59:9. Once a companion of the Prophet was starving and someone sent him food. The companion, instead of satiating his hunger, sent it to his neighbour who was also starving. Thus the food reached the seventh famished person, as all prior to him preferred to satiate the hunger of the other to their own. The Shaikh, in order to motivate people to be charitable concluded his narration by citing verse 57:11 from the *Qur'ān*: "*Whoever will advance a good loan to God, (as alms) He will double it for him, so he will have a generous reward.*" (Qalandar, 1959, pp.167-68, my emphasis).

To further emphasise his point, the Shaikh discussed an incident related to Ali through which he communicated that *sadaqa* is also given to treat diseases. He narrated that Ali- the commander of the faithful often took his friends home and shared his meals with them. Once Abu Hurairah, one of Ali's friends accompanied him to his house, hoping to get something to eat after facing three days of starvation. On reaching home, Ali asked Fatima to serve Hurairah whatever was there. They offered three bread pieces that were meant for Ali but Hurairah was still hungry. Then Ali asked Fatima to give the oil that was meant for soothing the swelling in Ali's throat saying that voluntary charity (*sadaqa*) should be done to treat one's illness (Qalandar, 1959, p. 165).

3.3. Feeding the Needy: The most crucial aspect of philanthropy

In all the three Shaikhs pedagogy, priority is given to satiating the hunger of the poor and the needy. In fact Shaikh Nizām al-Dīn preached that it was better to spend one dirham in feeding people rather than giving twenty dirhams as

¹⁰ "Whoever will advance a good loan to God, who will double it for him so he will have a rich reward. Qalandar, 1959, pp. 165-68)

donation (Sijzi, 1990, p. 240). Then to encourage his followers to share food with others, he mentioned the blessing bestowed on a person for such an act. He cited the tale of Abu Ishāq Gazrunī who always shared his food with others. Once, he shared his food with three *darweshes* passing by. Grateful, the *darweshes* blessed that both his worlds would be secure. On account of their blessings, he attained perfection on the mystic path and after his demise- there was peace, solace and plenty of wealth on his shrine (Sijzi, 1990, pp. 435-36). The Shaikhs elaborating on the rewards of feeding people especially cited how once Changhiz (Genghis) Khan had freed a prisoner on account of the captive's father's virtue of satiating the hunger of strangers. Nizām al-Dīn also informed his audience that feeding people, particularly strangers, is considered praiseworthy in other religions as well (Sijzi, 1990, p. 241).

In practice, the Chishtī Shaikhs provided rest and relief to travellers in their hospices (*khānqāh*). Hamīd Qalandar, the scribe of the *malfūz-Khair al-Majālis*- gave a vivid description of Nasīr al-Dīn Mahmūd providing aid to a blind and a lame man and those intending to set out on a journey (Qalandar, 1959, p. 74). People also turned to him for material assistance. Gesu Darāz, almost five decades later, too exemplified the charitable acts of Shaikh Nizām al-Dīn. He informed that Shaikh Nizām had fixed stipends for the prostitutes that he came across on his way to the tomb of Qutb al-Dīn and sent them food from his *khānqāh* on *urs* celebrations of his spiritual master. In addition, Shaikh Nizām al-Dīn sent food for a woman whose husband could not provide for the family adequately. The Shaikh provided relief for the people of Ghiyaspur after it was devastated by fire (Husainī, 1956, pp. 191-92). These Chishtī Shaikhs motivated their followers to be prompt and magnanimous in doing both obligatory and voluntary charity and also practiced philanthropy themselves.

3.4 Efforts to curtail misuse of altruism

These Chishtī Shaikhs also ensured that people's magnanimity and readiness to do charity should not encourage people in need to spread their hands to seek from others. They cited the *Qur'ānic* passages and sayings of the Prophet (*ahadis*) to inform people to seek from none but God even if in dire need. Nasīr al-Dīn quoted and explicated several *ahadis* with the import that one should ask from none but God. In fact, he encouraged people not to seek even from God. For instance, the Shaikh cited a saying of the Prophet that when anyone of the servants of God is engrossed in His devotion and shuns seeking, then He bestows on him more and even better than what He gives to the seekers (Qalandar, 1959, p. 67). The other *hadis* that the Shaikh elaborated upon for his congregation was that all those who ask from God, their requests are fulfilled but those who do not are better rewarded as God purifies non-seekers and holds them dear and proximate (Qalandar, 1959, p. 164). Further, Nasīr al-Dīn Mahmūd cited a stanza from the *masnawi* of Rumi,

If you desire paradise then seek from none, I ensure paradise

And the vision of God If you seek not, said the prophet. (Qalandar, 1959, p.163-4).

Nizām al-Dīn instructed that one who neither desires nor seeks is a pious one (Sijzi, 1990, p.67).

4. Conclusion

The Early Chishtī Shaikhs in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, in their didactics of religion, were deeply concerned about people's praxis of faith with a moral vision. They gave primacy to taking care of the poor, hungry and those in bondage rather than on just ritualistic observation of religion. Their beliefs and didactics emphasize that it is both important to serve God and His people, and are manifest in the pedagogy of the Shaikhs related to charity. They drew upon the sources of *sharī'a-Qur'ān*, *hadis*, *sunnah* and cited exemplary charitable acts of the Prophet, his family and his companions to encourage their followers to be particular about their duty towards the denied sections of the society. They attempted to make Muslims philanthropic by exemplifying the charitable acts of other pious people from the past as well. While instructing people about the injunctions of *sharī 'a* related to the charity, they laid down how it should be practiced. To motivate people to do both compulsory and voluntary charity, they underscored and described the rewards and benefits that accrued to an individual on account of his/her charitable acts. The usage of these pedagogic mechanisms by the Chishtīyas was aimed at making people adhere to religion with an ethical vision where service to God was as important as taking care of His people especially the weak and the denied. They also emphasized that a crucial aspect of being sensitive to one's fellow beings was to give preference to the needs of the others over one's own. The sources of *sharī 'a* enjoined the Muslims to be both compulsorily and voluntarily charitable but those tenets were highlighted and given primacy in the praxis of faith in South Asia by the Chishtī Sufis.

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