



The Sufi Visualization of North Indian Society During 13th & 14th Century

Looking at the Medieval Society through the teachings
of the Great Indian Sufi Saint
Nizam ud din Auliya

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FLOW OF PRESENTATION

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AREA OF STUDY

- ▶ The History of 13th & 14th Century India represents mainly the **political condition** of the period.
- ▶ Emphasis is mostly on a **change** from a previous “**Hindu**” regime to a “**Muslim**” State.
- ▶ For Historians, “**Everyday Lives**” are of little interest as they found it “**irrelevant**” in the political history of the state.



My Area of Proposed Study is certain aspects of Social Life which are completely ignored or cursorily treated by the Historians of this period

THE SOURCE

- My Source is a 13th Century Sufi Text **Fawaid ul Fuad**.
- The Source is a **Malfuzat** or Spoken Words
- It's a record of Teachings of **Shaykh Nizam ud din Auliya**.
- The teachings are described indirectly through anecdotes, a loose structuring which remain cognizant of the presence of varieties of conducts and beliefs.
- The text carries incidental information about material conditions, traditions and social lives of people in the 13th & 14th Century.
- The Malfuzat was compiled by Shaykh's disciple **Amir Hassan Sizji**
- The source will be used to capture the social attitudes, presuppositions concerning normative behavior of people



Source : 13th Century Sufi Text; Fawaid ul Fuad

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SOURCE

- ▶ The Malfuz is a reflection of Nizam ud din Auliya's assemblies in the context of how individuals should live in their lives
- ▶ The members would often bring their domestic and personal problems to the Shaykh
- ▶ The Shaykh, in the congregations, would explain to his audience how they should live their lives as virtuous Muslims and thus contains valuable source for Social History
- ▶ The discussions as recorded in the text, are valuable historical inputs as they provide a sense of how their lives were constructed
- ▶ However, the Malfuz is a discursive text. It carries the Shaykh's teachings rather than reflecting the actual condition.
- ▶ The Malfuz actually carries messages concerning how these conditions needed to be re-ordered in accordance to the master's teachings

The Malfuz is a discursive text: Should be studied by 'sifting the grains'.



RECONSTRUCTION OF SOCIAL LIFE

- Some of the much “neglected subjects” of Social History are Parenting and Schooling
- The two aspects of Social life are vital importance in understanding how a society reproduces its values and customs
- Parenting and schooling are normally conservative stabilizing elements in society through which an older generation seeks to ensure that their ideals and morals are reproduced in the next generation
- The text carried information on how a charismatic individual like the Shaykh sought to impress people with his way of thinking
- In implementing his ideal, he was not hegemonic, rather it was non-aggressive yet didactic to give an impression of an easily accessible benevolent and rationalistic ‘Pir’



PARENTING

- ▶ The text highlights that there was a clear bias towards male child
- ▶ Apparently, the girl child was not preferred, although women were invoked as mother and saints
- ▶ Belief in superstitions, particularly in the context of determining a child's personality seems to have been questioned by Nizam ud din Auliiya
- ▶ However, Shaykh himself freely preached and suggested auspicious names for children.
- ▶ Children's voice was completely absent in his daily teachings
- ▶ The information from the text largely focused on the children's world as visualized by adults
- ▶ It was considered that a child's action was influenced by the biological inheritance or 'genes' of the child
- ▶ The child was eventually disciplined to adopt the ways of the family and finally moved out of his home to see the outer world

SCHOOLING

- ▶ The Socializing of a child with family members forms his preliminary ideas of the existing world around him
- ▶ A child born to a Muslim family was initiated to the boarder understanding of Muslim thought of the period only at home.
- ▶ The initial schooling of a child usually takes place at home and not just by his parents but by the entire family as well.
- ▶ Fawaid ul Fuad reflects upon diverse kinds of education and schooling.
- ▶ In 13th Century n Sultanate India, education was much informal and flexible compared to the later period comprising a systematic gradation of curriculum leading to schools.
- ▶ Schooling generally takes place in mosques, madrasas or Sufi khanqahs
- ▶ From the Shaykh's own experience as a student, it appears that great emphasis was laid on memorizing prayers
- ▶ It seemed that, most suitable way for them to learn prayers was to memorize them
- ▶ The Pir referred to school going children as being 'dragged in chain to mosque and compelled to study'
- ▶ For Nizam ud din Auliya, real education occurred when 'Nur I Batin' or 'the inner intellect' was awakened in an individual

WORK

- ▶ Information of work in Fawaid ul Fawad is paradoxical
- ▶ On one hand Shaykh implied that 'work' involving profiteering can tie an individual into materialistic world and could be a hindrance towards living a Quarnic-inspired life.
- ▶ On the other hand, his conversations reflect upon sundry types of occupations and labour
- ▶ It represents his observations not just on work, but the correct attitude towards work

TRADE AND COMMERCE

- Of all occupations, most exalted occupation was of 'Trade and Commerce', perhaps due to its association with Prophet Mohammad. But undue profit making was unacceptable to the Shaykh
- A grocer who fasted for 25 years, but did not let anybody know about it was something that the Sufi master found praiseworthy
- The text provides fleeting references to shopkeepers like paper sellers, craftsmen, knife-fixers etc. In fact, the special skill of a particular knife fixer seems to be the outcome of his miraculous power which he possessed due to his piety-mindedness
- **Agrestic and domestic labour:** Both Agrestic and domestic labour were comprised of slaves
- The condition of both peasants and domestic servants: slaves or free, were equally bad.
- The Sufi master upheld the occupation of agriculture, but questioned the materialistic attitudes of the disciples.

SLAVES

- ▶ Slaves are frequently mentioned in various texts, especially in Chronicles as a commodity to be owned by Sultans and reach people, particularly for military and domestic purposes
- ▶ However, the Text does not throw light on the manner of their procurement
- ▶ The Text suggests that the slaves had a pathetic life and were subjected to ill treatment by their masters for their slightest indiscretion
- ▶ Slaves with unique qualities seemed to have been considered very expensive, especially, his spiritual qualities could fetch the owner a high price for his slave.



SERVICES FOR THE STATE

- ▶ It is generally believed that 'Chistis' in general and Nizam al din Auliya in particular always stayed away from the state politics and never recommended 'state services'
- ▶ But the text reflects somewhat 'positive' attitude towards state services.
- ▶ The best examples are his most favorite disciples like Amir Hasan Sijzi, the compiler of the text Fawaid al Fuad and Amir Khusrau, the great poet were both engaged in state services as soldier and court poet respectively
- ▶ Even the Shaykh himself, in his early life, wanted to become a Qazi, which indicated that 'Qaziship' was the dream of every educated and ambitious youth
- ▶ Thus, scholars opinion regarding 'Chisti' attitude towards state services does not seem plausible

LEISURE IN FAWAID AL FUAD

- ▶ Leisure has been conceived as a 'feeling of freedom' that people experience by participating in pleasurable activities during 'free time'
- ▶ In medieval period, 'leisure activity' was not an ideal type related to ideal types of the modern city and capitalist productions
- ▶ In a primarily agrarian society, leisure and work appear to be intertwined and almost indistinguishable from each other
- ▶ The Shaykh's conversations are suggestive of a variety of different leisure activities of that time, but detail remain elusive.
- ▶ Those leisure activities were figured which were reported in the general context of his teachings
- ▶ If singing, merriment or festivals received less importance at his hands, it was not indicative of their overall absence in the life of people in the 13th Century



CONCLUSION

- The text Fawaid al Fuad, throws light on these aspects of social history that are ignored by the much esteemed court-chronicles
- Subjects like social life of common people, their beliefs, culture and their everyday life have remained untouched by the chronicles
- Fawaid al Fuad, on the contrary, owing to the nature of its contents could capture the social history of the common people very skillfully
- However, the text is at times, remain silent about the social activities of certain groups of people - slaves and women raising a question, 'Did they 'lack a life'?
- To conclude, the text should be studied critically as it is a discursive text, the various social aspects have been depicted from the perspective of the Shaykh

The Source is a treasure for writing Social History of 13th Century India:
But to be studied critically as it depicts from the perspective of a Sufi Pir