Chapter - 4

"Comparative study of Ahsan-ul-Aqwal and Khair-ul-Majalis."
The Malfuz literature of medieval India is of great value from the historical point of view. Our medieval histories are mostly chronicles of the lives and achievements of the rulers and the nobility. Through these collection of mystic utterances, we get a glimpse of the medieval society in all its fullness, if, not in all its perfection the moods and tensions of the common man, the inner yearnings of his soul, the religious thought at its higher and lower levels, the popular customs and manners and above all the problems of the people. The Malfuz literature calls for a systematic and careful study with a view to having a glimpse of the life of the common man during the medieval period. A Malfuz, to be really so, should give a living account of the assemblies of a mystic teacher, nay, even details of his day to day life should be reflected in it. If, on the contrary, it creates the dull and placid atmosphere of a scholarly dissertation, wanting in the warmth of human company, it ceases to be a Malfuz.

The method and technique of compilation followed in these Malfuz collections varies from compiler to compiler. Before one attempts to draw material of historical significance from these collections, he should first study carefully the life of the Shaikh and predilections of the complier. Once the background in which the discussions took place becomes clear, the historical value of the data supplied can be easily evaluated; if our history is to be something more than a mere record of political events and governmental changes, the Malfuz literature of medieval India will
have to be utilized both as corrective of the impressions created by the court chronicles and as a source of information for the religious, cultural and literary movements of the period. No other types of literature give us such intimate view of the life and problems of the common man. «I have several daughters (to marry) but no means of livelihood."¹ The governor is very harsh on me."² Such problems one comes across only in the Malfuz literature of medieval India. One meets in the Khanqahs poor people bent down by hunger and starvation, rich people tormented by flames of mundane ambition, men in search of God and in search of Mammon. How they behaved in the Indian milieu and helped in constructing linguistic and social bridges between the Indian people and the Muslims can be seen in this literature. In fact the mystics had thrown open their Khanqahs to all sorts of people—rich and poor, nobles and plebian’s, citizens and villagers, free born and slaves, young and old, men and woman.³ The Khanqah and the bazar (market) were the only two places where people of all strata and all walks of life could be found. The collections chosen for this purpose represent different areas, different Silsilah and different traditions.

The development of the Chishti Malfuzat literature may be sketched in two stages. First it is necessary to desirable the discourses of Nizamuddin Auliya and compare them with those of his two disciples

¹ Khair-ul-Majalis, p-37
² Fawaid-ul-Fuwad, p-147
³ Barani, Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi, p-243
Nasiruddin Mahmud (d.1356 A.D) and Burhanuddin Gharib (d.1337 A.D). These texts may be called, for convenience the “original” Malfuzat. The prominence of the first two of these texts among the many Malfuzat is evident in the fact that they are the only once have been published in modern critical editions, and only Nizamuddin has been translated into English. The discourses of Burhabnuddin and his successor’s Ziyauddin are preserved in several unedited texts, which up to now have recited hardly an attention from scholars. An analysis of theses texts, which form the basis for the study of the Sufis of Khuldabad considerably, adds to our understanding of the development of the Malfuzat literature. The “original” texts all written by literate and courtly disciples may be juxtaposed with another series of Malfuzat purposing to be dictated by the principal Chishti Shaikh to their successor, illustrating the main line of initiative authority in the order. These “retrospective” texts, the authenticity of which has been challenged stressed the hagiographic mode of personal charisma an authority, while the “original” once focused on the practice and speculation but all the Malfuzat texts made the person of the Sufi master and essential part of the teaching.

Thus the working of mystic ideas and institutions at Delhi, Daulatabad, Nagaur and Uchch may be read in these collections.

The extent to which Malfuz literature was considered sacrosanct may be gauged from the fact that people transcribed these works for their spiritual bliss and benedictions. The practice did not remain confined to the Chishti Silsilah, saints of other orders-Suhrawardis, Firdausis, Naqshbandis,
Qadiris and Shattaris—followed the tradition. The literature produced under this category during the last six centuries or so constitutes a veritable source of information for the life and thought of medieval mystics.

**Khairul Majalis and Ahsan ul Aqwal:**

The Khair ul Majalis has a place of its own in this Malfuz literature of the fourteenth century A.D. It does not, of course, come up to the standard of the Fawaid ul Fuad which combines, in a very rare degree, conciseness of expression with fullness of thought, but it is certainly superior to all other Malfuz collection of the period, both in form and in its thought content. A Malfuz, to be really so, should give a living account of the assemblies of a mystic teacher. If, on the contrary, it creates the dull and placid atmosphere of a scholarly dissertation and pedantic discourses and teachings wanting in the warmth of human society, it ceases to be a Malfuz. The Khair-ul-Majalis is a living record of the assemblies of Shaikh Nasir. Its reader can visualize the ambience of the Majlises (gatherings) of Shaikh Nasir and his followers, he or she can have the feeling of belonging to the gatherings. Such situation emerges because its compiler Hamid Qalandar provides intricate details of the gatherings and the assemblies.

A reader of the Khair-ul-Majalis meets Shaikh Nasir at different times and in different moods and thus gets an opportunity to see the Shaikh himself and study his reaction to different situations. Other Malfuz collection of the period does not provide this varied, intimate and comprehensive study of the saints. Besides, what has infinitely enhanced the position of Khair-ul-
Majalis in the Malfuz literature of the fourteenth century A.D is its clarity of thought and expression. There are no meaningless miracles, no vague mystic lucubration's, and nothing ethereal about it, if miracles of some earlier mystics are mentioned, the purpose is to bring out some higher and noble principle of social life, rather than to attract popular imagination to supernatural stories.

The Ahsan-ul-Aqwal, no doubt, contains very useful information about the teaching of Maulana Burhanuddin Gharib. It provides valuable information about different topics discussed by the Shaikh in the gatherings. However, it does not make us move in the company of the great saint. The Shaikh's personality remains hidden in abstract discussions.

In the Khair ul Majalis, Majalis are numbered but the dates of individual meetings are not given. Barring one defect- that of having no dates of individual conversations-the Khair-ul-Majalis occupies a very high place in the vast Malfuz literature that was introduced in India during the fourteenth century A.D. The Khair-ul-Majalis bears evidence to his knowledge of the religious sciences, particularly the Quran and the Hadith. Hamid could write bombastic and high flown language according to the standards of the age. He was also a poet though he did not make a mark in that field. Hamid left a diwan which has disappointed probably on account of its poor literary value.

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4 Shaikh 'Abdul Haq's remarks in Akhbar-ul-Akhyar, pp-109-110
The Ahsan-ul-Aqwal follows a different method. The conversations are arranged under different heads. The compiler starts with a principle, then quotes a Rawish (practice) of the saints of the Silsilah and then gives Burhan (arguments) in support of the practice. This method is clear and easily intelligible but lacks the life and warmth of discussion and falls to the level of dry aphorisms.

In Khair-ul-Majalis, particularly those relating to strict adherence to Shariat, rejection of government service, repudiation of hereditary succession to the Sajjadah of saints, condemnation of the fabricated Malfuz literature and other similar things, were not acceptable to the later day mystic who discouraged, on that account, its wide circulation. Biographical details were, no doubt, freely drawn, but its thought content was deliberately ignored. The Khair-ul-Majalis could not be a happy reading for mystics who consorted with kings and nobles, dabbled in politics, perpetuated succession to the saint in their own families, paid scant respect to the injunctions of Shariat used mazamir (musical instruments) in their audition parties and placed the Pir on a pedestal as high as that of the Prophet.

The Khair-ul-Majalis is probably the first work of an Indian mystic in which the mathnawi of Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi (ob.672 A.H/1273 A.D)\(^5\) Traditions and legends about the great Muslim mystic Mansur Hallaj were

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\(^5\) Khair-ul-Majalis,p-163
current in the mystic circles of medieval India, but his book is referred to, probably for the first time, in this work. Shaikh Nasiruddin undoubtedly drew his information from many sources, but he did not believe in mere dry repetition. The clarity of his thought and the lucidity of his expression show that he had thoroughly assimilated the ideas contained in the work. Khair-ul-Majalis is valuable in the mystic literature of the Middle Ages because they take out mysticism from the meshes of abstruse thought and illustrate it as an operative principle in actual life.

The principles of 'Awarif-ul Ma'arif' which as a matter of fact formed the basis of the Chishti mystic thought in the early middle ages, have been briefly indicated but very carefully illustrated in the Ahsan ul Aqwal. Some of the anecdotes relating to Shaikh Farid Ganje Shakra and Shaikh Abu Bakra Tusi are interesting and informative. For instance, it is from the Ahsan-ul- Aqwal alone that we know that the 'Kafiran e Siyah Posh' visited the Khanqah of Baba Farid.

The Khair-ul-Majalis does not spin fine mystic ideas; it shows the working of these ideas in actual life and their translation into space time forces. The Khair-ul-Majalis is an important source of information of many Indo-Muslim saints, e.g., Shaikh Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki, Shaikh Farid,

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6 Khair-ul-Majalis, p-155
8 Khair-ul-Majalis, p-20-25,37-39
Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya, Qazi Hamiduddin Naguri, Malik Yar Parran. But for this Malfuz, many aspects of mystic life and activity in medieval India would have remained totally obscure. The importance of these accounts may be estimate from the fact that almost all hagiographers of medieval India have drawn their material from this book.

The Khair-ul-Majalis do not give us any precise information about the influence of Hindu religious thought on Muslim mystics. The Khair-ul-Majalis too does not touch that sphere, but two very significant facts are found in it. This is evidently the influence of Hindu doctrine of transmigration of souls. There is nothing in the Quran or the Traditions of the prophet to corroborate this view. Other significant fact is that the Shaikh found affinity between the Hindu and the Muslim saints in one respect. A true Sufi according to him was one who regulated his breath; and a class of Jogis too, he said, believed in regulating the breath.

Besides, the Khair-ul-Majalis has significance in the broader context of mystic development in the Islamic world in the middle ages. The age of Shaikh Nasir had thrown a challenge to mystic though all over the Muslim world and the Khair-ul-Majalis embodies the reaction of indo Muslim mysticism to this challenge. The reaction of Indo-Muslim mysticism to this intellectual ferment created by the movement of Ibn-Taimiyya may be read in the Khair-ul-Majalis. He stopped the objectionable practices, but firmly protected the basis ideals of mysticism.

The cult of grave worship which had developed in the fourteenth century
A.D was a negation of the true spirit of Islam. Shaikh condemned grave worship but did not disapprove visits to the graves of saints.

Shaikh Nasiruddin's view about the vision of God is clearly stated in the Khair-ul-Majalis. The Shaikh believed that the vision of God is possible in this world. The Khair-ul-Majalis breathes the atmosphere of the Tughlaq period, its pessimism, depression and sadness. In the Khair-ul-Majalis a brief but significant account of the reaction of a Delhi Khanqah to reports of a Mongol invasion during the reign of Alauddin Khalji.

The Ahsan-ul-Aqwal is so clear and lucid that it can be understood even by amateur mystics. But it is not an assembly in which one moves while going through the books; it has the atmosphere of a book of aphorism. The Ahsan-ul-Aqwal helps us in understanding the principles and practices propagated by him in the distant South. In Delhi the towering personality of Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya was himself a beacon's light and an example, in the Deccan his precepts had to be made known in simple and popular idiom to disseminate the teaching of the Silsilah.

The Khair-ul-Majalis is a typical illustration of the Persian language as spoken in India in the 14th century A.D. Even where abstruse subjects are

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9 Khair-ul-Majalis, p-194-195

10 Ibid, p-259-260
discussed, the colloquial touch is easily discernible. On the whole it combines elegant simplicity with easy sequence of thought. The clarity and lucidity in the style and expression of Khair-ul-Majalis is, in fact, due to the clarity of Shaikh Nasir's thought. He has explained the most abstract ideas in the simplest language. His method of narrating relevant anecdotes on every point, like his master Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya, has made his thought intelligible even to the most ordinary intellects and has considerably enhanced the educative value of these conversations.

The most popular field of study of the Indian Mussalmans in the 14th century A.D was Fiqh (Muslim Jurisprudence). Large number of books dealing with various aspects of Muslim law was written during this period and several compilations of Fatwa were also made. Shaikh Nasir himself was keenly interest in Fiqh. The corner stone of Shaikh Nasiruddin's ethical thought, as revealed in the Khair-ul-Majalis, is Taqwa (fear of God). He believed that all virtues flow from it and those "fear God" get their subsistence from the divine. Taqwa is an attitude of mind and can be developed only by sincerity of purpose because the mystic path itself is a path of truth and morality.

1. Haqq-i-Taqwa, i.e. obligation to pray to god as He should be feared.
2. Haqq-i-Ibadat, i.e. obligation to pray to god as He should be prayed to.
3. Haqq-i-Tilawat, i.e. obligation to recite the Quran as it should be recited and

\[11\text{ some religious and cultural Trends of the Tughlaq period published in the journal of the Pakistan historical society, 1953}\
\[12\text{ Khair-ul-Majalis, p-25, 157}\

161
4. Haqq-i-Marifat, i.e. the obligation to strive for gnosis.

The inspiring motive of a man's action should be the desire to seek the pleasure of god. The divine approval lies in strict adherence to what He has obtained and in total abstention from what He has forbidden. If a man takes to preaching, his aim should be neither money nor fame but God alone. The primary importance of Khair-ul-Majalis lies in its clear and lucid exposition of the ideals, aims and activities of his spiritual order. What was the ideal of the Chishti saints? What did they aim at and strive for? What were their metaphysical and cosmological concepts? How did they react or adjust themselves to the existence of a political order which did not represent the true political spirit of Islam?

The Ahsan-ul-Aqwal is divided into twenty nine chapters which deal with some specific theme, such as 'the practice and etiquette of the assemblies of saints,' relationship between disciples and his spiritual teacher, customs and ceremonies associated with the process of initiation in the mystic fold, dealings with the people, spiritual morality, principles governing the acceptance of Futuh' (unasked for gifts), evil consequences of greed and sex, principle to be followed with reference to audition parties and prayers and penitences'. There is hardly any aspect of Muslim mystic's life during the sultanate period which has not been referred to here. Taken as a whole, it is a very valuable source of information for the early history of the Chishti Silsila and the precepts and practices of the Sufis as well as their principles of organization.
The information supplied by Khair-ul-Majalis about the political and economic conditions of the time is invaluable. It is very often said that market control of Alauddin Khalji was motivated by the militaristic needs of the state. The Khair-ul-Majalis shows that this is not wholly correct and that the sultan was inspired by altruistic and philanthropic considerations in enforcing his economic regulations. The impression created by Barani that Alauddin Khalji was a godless king is contradicted by Khair-ul-Majalis. In fact Isami's assessment of the Sultan is fully confirmed by Shaikh Nasiruddin Chiragh-i-Delhi.\(^{13}\)

The political chronicles of the period speak about prosperity and affluence during the time of Firoz Shah Tughlaq, \(^{14}\) but it appears from the Khair-ul-Majalis that the common man found himself in great difficulties during that period.

The Khair-ul-Majalis supplies some very interesting pieces of information about the life of the medieval saints, their adverse circumstances and their contact with the poor folk. The Shaikh had a word of advice for all sorts of people-teachers, cultivators, Qazi and revenue officers etc. The essence of his advice was to “remember God” under all conditions of life and to lead a life of rectitude and virtue. The confusion and consternation produced by sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq’s religious policies among a section of Delhi’s religious elite was replaced by orthodoxy of Sultan Firoz Shah, but

\(^{13}\) Futhus-Salatin, P-300-330
\(^{14}\) Afif, Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi, p-99-100
neither the reversal of the former policies, nor the new liberal grants to Khanqahs satisfied the age of Nasir. Although one can lament the lack of dates in the Khair-ul-Majalis. Its discourses, a compendium of the ethics of Chishtis, give a lively picture of the changing pattern of their attitude towards social and economic dilemmas.

The teachings of Shaikh Nasiruddin Mahmud embodied in the Khair-ul-Majalis represented a peak in Chishti philosophy which had evolved in India during the course of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Following the traditions of his spiritual ancestors, he emphasized both the necessity to associate with common people and a simultaneous withdrawal from them. In the Khair-ul-Majalis Shaikh Nasiruddin specified the meaning of two words that were anathema to a dervish. Firstly there was a Muqalid, or Sufi without a Pir, secondly, was the Jarrat, or a person who donned an excellent Khirqa and the cap of a Sufi and who visiting the sultan’s and his officials, begged for money. Such a person was a Jarrat because he sold religion. Common people were forced to go to a bazaar and sell their goods but spiritualists should not ask for anything from others. He should bolt his door and pray for his spiritual and material needs which come from god.\textsuperscript{15} The sine, qua non of a Sufi life was the belief that the Beloved (god) is for us and our life is for the beloved.\textsuperscript{16} The highest form of penitence was the severance of all relation from everything but God.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{15} Khair-ul-Majalis,p-41-42,p-80
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid,p-41-42
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid,p-25
There were two kinds of fetters, the Shaikh and the other to the self. The first shackle was the family, and the second, sensuality. Love of god drove away all thoughts of the family. The prophet Muhammad chose the life of a dervish rather than remaining affluent. True comfort was to be found in the house of a dervish, there was only grief in the house of a wealthy man. The lamentations in a dervish's dwelling were only for the love of god; nevertheless it was a source of satisfaction and contentment of them.18

The Khair-ul-Majalis featured a detailed account of some of the teachings of Shaikh Nizamuddin to his eminent disciples, amongst whom was Maulana Husamuddin Multani, Maulana Jamaluddin Nusratkhani and Maulana Sharafuddin were in the company of the Shaikh when he learned towards Maulana Husamuddin and stated: if one fasts all day and prays the entire night, he does the same as a widow; concentration on god which has enabled holy men to reach Him is something else together. He refused to explain further, but promised to do so on another occasion. About six months later, Maulana Husamuddin and above mentioned Sufis were gathered around their Pir. At that time Muhammad Katib, a Hajib, or a chamberlain, of Sultan 'Alauddin Khalji and also a disciple, came to the Shaikh, kissed the ground before him and sat down. Afterwards the chamberlain informed the Shaikh that he himself was a member of the court and that the Sultan had distributed large sums of money to the poor. The Shaikh questioned his disciples on the superior nature of either the sultan's charity to his people or the fulfillment of a promise, and they all

18 Ibid, p-103
agreed on the latter. Shaikh Nizamuddin then related six conditioned on
god making it possible for a Sufi to realize his goal.

1. One should retire to a lonely cell and leave it for neither company nor change.
2. One should always exist in a state of performing Wuzud (ablutions). One may sleep when necessary but on rising immediately perform Wuzu again.
3. Perpetual fasting should be observed.
4. With the exception of Zikr, constant silence should be practiced.
5. Zikr should be continually recited at the same time as a recollection in the heart of the presence of one’s Pir.
6. One should expel every thought except that of God.\(^{19}\)

If the Khairul Majalis is a testimony of consolidation of Chishti mystic ideas in the North India, especially Delhi and its surrounding, the Ahsan-ul-Aqwal shows the eagerness of the saint to disseminate in Deccan Chishti mystics principles which were tested in the north. Unlike the Khairul Majalis which has dozens of references to the rulers and political personality of the time, the Ahsanul Aqwal contains absolutely no reference to the political authorities of the day. The general attitude of the Shaikh Burhanuddin towards government service is in keeping with the traditions of the Chishti Silsilah. But like Shaikh Nasir, he also made a distinction between government services of different types. Government servants who worked on clerical jobs and had nothing to do so with the policy of the

\(^{19}\) Ibid, p-68-69
administration were entitled to be enrolled as mere disciples. Khwaja Ruknuddin, who was a Dabir, once expressed his desire to abandon government service but the Shaikh advised him to continue and serve the people." Doing good to people is better than sitting in a lonely corner," he remarked.

From the linguistic point of view one fact deserves to be noted. There are a number of Hindi words and Duhras in the Ahsan-ul-Aqwal. The Ahsan-ul-Aqwal has neither the depth of Fawaid-ul-Fuad nor the pathos of Khair-ul-Majalis, but it is wonderful clear—a fact which makes it highly effective for instructing persons not fully conversant with the principles of higher mysticism. The Fawaid-ul-Fuad, demands from its reader, not only unflagging attention but also, penetrating intelligence to unravel the atmosphere in which the Shaikh spoke. But these two Malfuz literatures are very simple books written in the Persian language which was spoken by the common people of those days. These two books under study are also devoid of high philosophical thoughts; therefore they are easy to understand for the lay follower as well as for laymen.