3. LIFE IN THE SULTANATE PERIOD AS DEPICTED IN THE PERSIAN MALFUZAAT

As mentioned in the previous chapter, one of the most significant features of *malfuzaat* is that it deals with subject matter that other historical texts of the same period have omitted. Expert in medieval Indian history, S.A.A Rizvi, comments that “Modern works in Islam in the Indian subcontinent have not made adequate use of Sufi literature in analyzing the political, social and economic history of medieval India”.¹ It is still true today that Sufi literature has been widely ignored, yet the *malfuzaat* are important and reliable alternatives for revealing the mentality and lives of the masses during the Sultanate era, reflecting the actions and reactions of the common man – their food habits, style of dress, money and currency, their dwellings, their festivals, places of worship, the commodities available at the market. We can also gain insight into details such as social class, religious rituals and practices, position of women, education, occupation, recreation, and climate. The scope of the *malfuzaat* then is not only a depiction of mystical experiences and discourses of the Sufis, but can be used to reconstruct the social life of the ordinary person. As such, we can utilize the *malfuzaat* to fill the gaps outstanding on life in the

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¹ Rizvi, S.A.A, “The Wonder that Was India”, Vol II, pxxxv.
Sultanate period, questions which many other historical texts of the period do not answer.

Appreciating the malfuzaat's focus on documenting life at the grassroots level, it is important to note that during the period of the compilation of the first and most famous malfuz book, the Fawaid-ul-Fuad, several ground-breaking political events took place that were not even touched on in the discourses of Nizamuddin Auliya. This indicates that these 'important' events did not disturb the fabric of daily life. That in spite of these political events that changed the course of history, within and around the khanqahs there continued an endless process of observation, assimilation and adjustment of diverse elements and tendencies, which were giving shape and complexion to the cultural traditions of India. Whilst Alauddin Khalji introduced a market policy of price fixing to boost his economic power, Sufis were studying and interacting with the common people, and as such, malfuzaat depicts a broad composite culture,

\[2\] 1308 - Expedition to Malwa
1310 - Malik Naib’s expedition into the south Indian peninsula
1316 - Death of Alauddin, Accession of Shihabuddin Umar, Death of Malik Naib, Deposition of Umar and accession of Qutbuddin Mubarak
1317-18 - Extinction of Yadava dynasty
1320 - Usurpation by Nasiruddin Khusrav, Foundation of Tughlaq dynasty, founded by Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq
1321 - Expedition of Warangal under Muhammad Jauna, Rebellion of Muhammad
1323 - Second expedition to Warangal under Muhammad bin Tughlaq

\[3\] K.A Nizami, "Some Aspects of Religion and Politics in India During the 13th century", p 69.

\[4\] Due to numerous invasions of India by the Mongols at their height of power and strength, Khalji expanded his military power through introducing a market policy, which included price fixing, and there were markets in Delhi at which prices were fixed on grain, cloths, cattle and slaves. See Satish Chandra's "Medieval Indian: From Sultanate to Mughal".
demonstrating that there was no break in daily activities despite the momentous political events that took place concurrently.

The *Fawaid-ul-Fuad*, a contemporary work during the reign of Sultan Alauddin Khalji, is a unique blend of articulate expression and thoughts. Despite the fact that throughout Nizamuddin’s lifetime there reigned four important sultans, no description of their accession or their political achievements is given in this work. The routine life in his *khanqah* was unperturbed by these changes in power structure, and like his predecessors, Auliya refrained from indulging in court politics, maintaining a certain distance from the various rulers. As a result, his discourses were completely devoid of political affairs and were confined to topics such as *tafseer* (exegesis), *hadith* (tradition), *fiqh* (jurisprudence), history, *Siyar-ul-Auliya* (biographies of saints), *Malfuzaat-I-Mashaikh* (conversation of saints), *namaz* (prayer offering), mysticism, *akhlaqiyaat* (public etiquette), philosophies, stories of Sufi saints, language, literature, and *sama* (musical gatherings). His prime concern was the service of mankind as exemplified by his assertion that altruistic service is more important than formal ritual.6

5 Alauddin Khalji (1296-1316), Muburak Khalji (1316-1320), Khusrau Khan (1320), Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq (1320-1325)
Before reviewing parables of the *malfuzaat*, it is helpful to have some understanding of the history and culture of the period under study. In each and every story, it is not the miracle that carries weight but the message in it. Every symbol in the following parable signifies a thought, an approach, and an ideological inclination of the storyteller. The excerpt below is taken from the *Fawaid-ul-Fuad*, and is a story of Sufi saint, Maulana Kaithali. It is a fine example of a parable which reveals certain details about daily life during Nizamuddin’s days:

“One year there had been a famine in Delhi. It occurred during the reign of Qutbuddin Hasan. Passing through the cloth market, I became hungry and bought some food. I said to myself that I should not eat this food alone. I sought someone with whom to share it. I saw a dervish wearing a Sufi cloak. He passed before me, patched garment and all. I called out to him “Oh Khwaja, I am a dervish and you too a dervish. I am poor and you too appear to be poor. There is this bit of food. Come let us share it!” The dervish agreed. We went to the vicinity of a restaurant and began to eat. During the meal I looked at the dervish and said “O Khwaja! I owe twenty tankas. I must repay that debt”, he replied, “Eat your food with a clear heart. I will give you twenty tankas”. Maulana Kaithali said, “I thought to myself, from where will this man with his threadbare cloak find twenty tankas to give me…”

In short, when they finished eating, the dervish got up and motioned Maulana Kaithali to follow him. He went to a mosque behind which was a

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7On Muharram 11, 711, A.H Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya narrated this story to his disciples, which he had heard from Maulana Kaithali, “Fawaid-ul-Fuad”, 21st Assembly of 2nd fascicle, p403
grave, and said something and with a small stick he had in his hand, and striked the grave a couple of times. As he did so, he said “This dervish needs twenty tankas, provide it for him”. Having said this, he turned towards Kaithali and announced “The master will provide. You will get twenty tankas”. The story went on and at the end Maulana Kaithali got the required amount from a Turk sitting on the balcony of his home.

A miracle to most, historians on the other hand will see important information in this parable about certain idiosyncrasies of that period. For followers, the moral of the story was to adhering to humanistic Sufi principles, even at the time of calamity. For historians, it is not the return of twenty tankas that is significant but the mention of famine. Although this story was narrated in A.D. 1311 (711 A.H.), there is no mention of famine in or around that period from other sources written at the time. The most severe famine that has been documented, which forced Sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq to leave Delhi and take shelter in Swargadwari near Kanauj, was much later. The famine in this story tells us that there was a scarcity of food grain in Delhi, and with the

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8 Medieval sources such as Barani’s “Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi”, “Fatwa-i-Jahandari” and “Hasrat Namah”, Shams Afif’s “Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi”, and Amir Khusrau’s “Tuglaq Namah” make no reference to the famine mentioned in the Fawaid-ul-Fuad.

9 Majumdar, R.C., Raychaudhari, H.C., Datta, K, “An Advanced History of India”, and Satish Chandra, Medieval India, p.68.
occurrence of drought, it is possible that the agricultural activities at that time were not enough to provide food to go around.

The *dervish* passing through a cloth market in time of famine is also significant. That he was waiting in a cloth market with some food so that he could share with someone is an example of Sufi principles in practice.

That the market was open and people were visiting the market may indicate that the occurrence of famine was only affecting the common people (another reason why medieval historical sources of the period do not mention the famine). However there was evidently enough business for the market to stay open, perhaps for wealthier people who had surplus money to buy clothes. This shows a disparity within the Islamic society of that era, of which the basic principle was so-called egalitarianism.

It has been noticed that people will go to any lengths to ‘grab a loaf’ in the time of famine. In the eighteenth century famine in Bengal for example, it is known that people sold their children, some of them ate dead animals, and some even consumed their children for a meal. Storage of food grain for economic reasons is one cause of famine. Through this story Nizamuddin conveyed the message that food should be shared, not stored, whatever amount one has, even during time of scarcity. Nizamuddin used this parable to convey a message about sharing through the attitudes of a Sufi *dervish* in the time of such scarcity.
Most kings of the sultanate period were not in favour of graveyard visitations, as it is against Islamic tenets. They considered it to be pagan behaviour, akin to worshipping idols. Sultans Firoz Shah Tughlaq and Sikander Lodhi made a law prohibiting ad hoc visitations to graveyards. In this story however, the dervish not only visited a graveyard, but also made a ritualistic plea at the foot of a grave. For a follower of Islam, asking from anybody except God was considered a heretical practice. Sufis however challenged this rule, a rule which was strongly upheld by the ulema.

Sufi saints were so engrossed in following ‘best practice’ in terms of the basic tenets of Islam that they even condoned giving preference to a slave over one’s own children. The following story was narrated by Nizamuddin in 1308 A.D, during the early days of the compilation of his malfuzaat, and is about this very subject, when a Sufi saint gives his khilafat to a slave. The story goes like this:

"...I had a slave named Malih. Out of the deference to the master – may God perpetuate his blessings – and in gratitude for the privilege of disciple, I had set him free and offered prayers on his behalf. On these occasions the master – may God prolong his blessings – observed that “there is no such thing as slavery and no dominion in the way, all who enter properly into the world of love do God’s work.” To explain what he meant, he told the story of a certain master from Ghazni. He had a slave named Zairak and that slave was extremely righteous and virtuous. When the time of death approached the Saint, his disciple asked, “Who will sit on your throne?” “Zairak” replied the saint. However, the saint had four sons, Ikhtiyar, Ajdal, Akbar and Ajla. Zairak asked in astonishment, “Oh Khawaja, would your
sons allow me to succeed? Every time they will ridicule me”. “Set your heart at ease” replied the saint, “If they cause you trouble, I will defend you from their evil machination”. In short, when the saint joined the realm of divine mercy, Zairak succeeded him. The sons of the saint started to create problems. They frowned upon Zairak by calling him a slave. When their harassment became intense, Zairak went to the grave of the saint pleading, “Oh master, you said you will defend me from your son’s assault. Now they are berating me and you must honour your promise”. After having said so, he returned home. Within a few days, non-believers attacked Ghazni. The inhabitants went out to fight them. All four of the saint’s progeny also joined the fray and perished in the battlefield. And Zairak continued to preach without any hurdles”10.

The aforementioned Malih, after he had taken vows of discipleship, offered two cycles of prayers. “What was your intention in offering these two cycles of prayer?” asked the master. “To expel everything except God,” replied Malih. The assemblies were related to the environment in which they took place. The location was Ghazni, an area famous for slave trading at the time. This particular hekayat (story) has three signifiers – the slave, his master and four sons. One thing, which is clear through this story, is that slavery was very much prevalent, and there were no restrictions placed on the practice of slavery by the rulers who were generally under the influence of the ulema. The story is centred on a slave who succeeds his master, superseding the master’s sons. The sons’

opposition to the succession of Zairak is indicative of the thinking prevalent at that time, and the contradictions, which were rife between practices and codes of conduct. The opposition of the master’s sons is a good example of the position of slaves in this society, but more revealingly, from the information gathered in the story, we learn that acquisition of knowledge was not restricted to noble lineage and *khilafatship* did not recognize kinship. In fact, most often the spiritual successors of Sufis were their favourite disciples, and sons were seldom preferred. The value of a man was measured not by his lineage, but by his Knowledge and virtuous deeds. Zairak, a slave, was nominated because of his virtuous nature.

This next story also regarding slavery during the sultanate period further highlights not only the prevalence of trading humans, but also the profitable nature of this business at the time. The *malfuzaat* however is unique touching on this topic, as it is here that we learn about the Sufi attitudes towards the business of trading people, and the unconventional position they took on releasing these people.

“In olden days a dervish... came from Bihar and stayed at the house of Shaikh ‘Ali Sijzi... This dervish used to beg for money from all quarters. “If you live in this house do not go about begging, I will give you something to live on,” Shaikh Ali said to him. He gave the

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11 Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti, Qutbuddin Bakhtiya Kaki, Baba Farid Ganj-i-Shakar, Nizamuddin Auliya, and Nasiruddin Chiragh-i-Delhi, bore no blood relation with their master or successor. In fact there was a slight skirmish between Nizamuddin and the sons of Baba Farid at the time Farid passed *khilafatship* to Nizamuddin.
dervish five hundred jitals. The dervish traded with the money and in a short time increased his capital to thirty tankas, then reinvested it increasing his capital to hundred tankas and purchased slaves with them. "Take your slaves to Ghazni," Shaikh Ali advised him, "they will fetch a higher price." The dervish acted on his advice. But he had one trustworthy slave to whom he said: "You become my disciple. The slave became his disciple.... In the Ghazni slave market people wanted to purchase this slave also. In the beginning the dervish denied but when the price of this slave rose from one to four, the dervish changed his mind. With eyes full of tears, the slave said to the dervish: "Khwaja, from the day I became your murid (disciple) you placed a cap on my head and said that it is the cap of Syedi Ahmad. Now you are going to sell me. Tomorrow on the day of judgement I will have a complaint against you before Syedi Ahmad". When the slave said this, the dervish's heart softened, he said to all present 'you bear witness to the fact that I have set this slave free'\(^{12}\).

The recording of the subaltern class history, as Gramsci says, is not a recent development.\(^{13}\) While historians like Ranajit Guha realized the importance of unhistorical histography in the second half of the twentieth century, the authors of the *malfuzaat* had been doing so since the beginning of the fourteenth century. The *malfuzaat* contains numerous references to the aggrieved subaltern classes seeking redressal of their problems. The very nature of these problems is a spotlight on contemporary society of that time. For example, when people would relay their problems to the Shaikh, his answer provides clues as to the type of individual he was addressing. In fact, Nizamuddin with his idiosyncratic ways of instruction, chose not to advise any

\(^{12}\) " *Fawaid-ul-Fuad*" p112.

\(^{13}\) Gramsci as quoted in the introduction editor Ranjit Guha's "Subaltern History".
visitor directly, rather offered a solution to the individual’s problems indirectly, suggesting remedies through anecdotes and parables. This is one of the reasons why the Fawaid-ul-Fuad includes several stories on the one theme.

It was in the khanqahs that the humanitarian aspects of Islam, namely equality and brotherhood, were practiced as well as preached. Prophet Muhammad preached the importance of unity and humanity, and speaking at Arafat shortly before his death, he emphasized the issue of brotherhood between Arabs and non-Arabs, and the concept of ummah (one community indivisible). He reiterated that Allah created each individual brethren for one another, regardless of race, religion and caste.14 Islamic Delhi, the seat of the sultanate empire, was presided over by a Muslim king, who asserted himself as working for the spread of Islam. Among the residents of Delhi, including wealthy merchants, bureaucrats, and important dignitaries, there was much hypocrisy. In a city built on Islamic principles of peace, justice and egalitarianism, the following comments were overheard in the khanqah and subsequently recorded in malfuzaat:

I have several daughters to marry but without any source of livelihood.15
The Governor is very harsh on me.16
My brother is ill and might have expired since I left him.17

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15 “Khair-ul-Mujalis” p. 37
16 "Fawaid-ul-Fuad" p. 147
I cannot drink the water of Jamuna because it increases appetite and I am very poor.¹⁸

Such stories about society during the Delhi sultanate can be found on the pages of the malfuzaat of the period in Persian. These comments reveal certain crucial social dilemmas that lay people were confronted with, and as is revealed, dilemmas, which were neglected by the ruling classes. Many history texts of the period neglect these problems; rather they focus on socio-political and economic events that generally gloss over the ground realities, employing a hyperbolic tone in appreciating the triumphs and exploits of their kings.

It is in malfuzaat that we learn about social problems, unabridged.

Regarding the realities of dowry and economics for the common man, the Khair-ul-Majalis tells us about a visitor who is disturbed because he has so many daughters but nothing to help them get married. Nizamuddin was very much distressed because of this common problem which he noticed in the society of his age:

"...So many poor and destitute people are sleeping in the corners of mosques and on the platforms of shops. They have nothing to eat for dinner. How can this food go down my throat?"¹⁹

¹⁷ ibid. p. 232
¹⁸ Nizamuddin observed an old woman fetching water from a well while the Jamuna flowed nearby. He enquired as to why she was taking the trouble of sourcing well water with the river so close. She answered, "my husband is poor, we have no food, the Jamuna is like an appetizer. To avoid hunger we drink water from the well". The reply brought Nizamuddin to tears and he arranged a regular supply of food and water to her. Jawami-ul-Kalim, p. 123, quoted by K.A. Nizami, "On History and Historians of Medieval India", p123.
It is evident from the above comment that the Delhi society of his age was not an ideal one. Though the rulers were Muslims, their guiding principle to rule northern India was led largely by economic and political ambitions. It seems there was no concept of a welfare policy especially for second class citizens. In the *Khair-ul-Majalis*, we read that Nasiruddin was disturbed by the fact that the rulers were not following the ideals of the Caliphs. He narrated a story of Umar’s reign and said:

"...All efforts of the former rulers were directed towards fostering the welfare of the people."

As he spoke in the past tense, it can be derived from the above statement that even during his lifetime, the period of Tughlaq, there was a lack of people-oriented policies, and the condition of the layperson left much to be desired. Medieval expert Satish Chandra, under the heading “Firoz’s Concept of Benevolence and People’s Welfare” states that all contemporary writers refer to the general prosperity in Firoz Shah’s long reign of 40 (lunar years), and the affordability of commodities. Shams Siraj Afif, the biographer of Firoz, says that there was “all round cheapness” in Firoz Shah’s reign without any effort on

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20 “Khair-ul-Majalis”, p. 139.
21 Chandra, Satish, “Medieval India: From Sultanate to the Mughal”, Part one, p.p.113 and 115.
his part. This is in direct contrast to the information in the *Khair-ul-Majalis*. At the same time that Shams Afif talks about affordability of commodities, the master’s *khanqah* was visited by people with economic problems. Following are excerpts from the *Khair-ul-Majalis* which out rightly reject the arguments for prosperity in the Tughlaq period:

*Langar in the time of Alauddin Khalji*\(^{23}\)

*Good feast can be arranged in 2 to 4 jitals...*\(^ {24}\)

*But all this had disappeared during the time of reigning Sultan, Firoz Tughlaq.*\(^ {25}\)

*... what a cheapness in those days [Alauddin Khalji’s era]*\(^ {26}\)

*Even beggars had one or two quilts [Alauddin Khalji’s era].*\(^ {27}\)

The words “cheapness in those days” indicates that during Nasiruddin’s time (during the reign of Tughlaq), commodities were costly compared to the price of commodities during Alauddin Khalji’s rule. This contradicts Shams Afif’s claim of cheapness of every commodity. As we can see from the excerpts above, Nasiruddin also witnessed a lack of good feast and langar. And the clue to price hikes in the line “Even a beggar had one or two quilts” which indicates the comparison between the economic condition of the Tughlaq period and its preceding ruling dynasty.

\(^{22}\) Ibid., part one, p.115.

\(^{23}\) *"Khair-ul-Majalis", p.185*

\(^{24}\) Ibid. p. 240.

\(^{25}\) Ibid. p. 240

\(^{26}\) Ibid. p. 240.

\(^{27}\) Ibid. p. 240.
It is likely that according to the court chroniclers, the general prosperity referred to in Firoz Shah’s long reign was exclusive, as Nasiruddin’s comment “what a cheapness in those days” is a strong indicator that life in his period was comparatively hard for the common man. It also implies that food grains were not readily available in the market. It is possible that the hoarding of food grain at this time, which goes against the principle of any welfare policy, was at its height. Here one can draw two conclusions.

Firstly, that what we read in court chronicles of the period is not the full story. The court chroniclers were state employees, and there was a tradition of *qasida khwani* (panegyric writings) in the Islamic world implemented to please the ruling monarch and earn a good living. The court chroniclers of Tughlaq were not entirely panegyric writers, but it is likely that they were influenced by this tradition. In any case, it was very unlikely to find criticism of a ruling Sultan from his salaried writers.

Secondly, ‘general prosperity’ may mean prosperity for those people in court circles, the elite class. A careful review of the *Khair-ul-Majalis* reveals that Nasiruddin did not live in an affluent period. Complaining about the disappearance of *langar*, commenting that during Alauddin’s reign there was plenty of community kitchen organized on a regular basis, the Tughlaq period was poor from this point of view. Nasiruddin personally faced it, and during
the days of his adversity, we know that he was helped by Nathu Patwa who came to him and placed two pieces of bread before him. What did he mean by “good feast in those days could be arranged in 2 to 4 jitals”? Here Nasiruddin possibly complaining about the rise in the price of arranging a good feast.

Nasiruddin’s perception about the age he lived in can also be justified with the survey of literature produced during the Tughlaq period. It is said that literature is a mirror of a society. Professor Khaliq Ahmad Nizami’s detailed study of literature of the Tughlaq and Khalji periods arrives at the same conclusion as Nasiruddin in *Khair-ul-Majalis*. Nizami says that the Persian literature produced during the Tughlaq period represents a milieu quite different from that of the Khalji period. The literature produced during the Tughlaq era is soaked in pessimism and breathes an atmosphere of frustration and despair, yet the literature produced during the time of Khalji’s is full of buoyancy, hope and confidence. This variation in the spirit of literature had its roots in the general political atmosphere of the period.

Here we can also compare conversations of both Nizamuddin and Nasiruddin, who lived in the Khalji and the Tughlaq periods respectively. Two distinctive passages from *Fawaid-ul-Fuad* and *Khair-ul-Majalis* demonstrate the differences not only between the two periods but also between two peers.

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28 Ibid. p. 213.
29 Nizami, K.A., “Supplement to Elliot and Dowson’s ‘History of India’”, Vol. III, p.35.
Nizamuddin and Nasiruddin. The atmosphere of both the khanqahs represents the atmosphere of their respective eras:

“One time (reports Hasan Sijzi) the subject under discussion was sama “I am perplexed,” I said, “no matter how many of the customary acts of devolution, or even how many of the special devotions of dervishes I perform I am frustrated. Yet when I participate in sama, complete tranquility and peace of mind overcome me. A similar state is produced when I am in the company of my spiritual master, for at that time my heart is free of the passions of the world and the lower self”. Is your heart then also free of attachments?” asked the Shaikh. “Yes, it is” I replied”.30

Sama, commented Nizamuddin, was of two kinds: assaulting and non-assaulting. The first is the kind which assaults the listener when he hears a (beautiful) voice or a line of poetry. It produces an agitation in him, and therefore is called “assaulting”. It is inexplicable. The second is “non-assaulting”, that is to say it has the effect of transporting the listener to some other place, whether it be the presence of God, or to the presence of the Shaikh, or to some place which he just happens to recall.31

Hamid Qalander begins his account of the 18th assembly by saying:

“I received the blessings of kissing the feet of the Shaikh. In this city nothing matters to me except the sacred tom of Shaikh Nizamuddin, and after that, the blessings of meeting with you”.32 “So long as one does not pursue the path” replied Nasiruddin, “he will not arrive at the goal. If you are idle and still hope to reach the goal, you will not reach it. Striving is the

30 “Fawaid-ul-Fuad” p. III- assembly 16
31 Ibid. p. III- assembly 16
32 “Khair-ul-Majalis”, 18th Assembly.
precondition for success."33 Those who strive in us, surely will guide them to our paths".

Afterwards he added, "And what is the fruit of this endeavour? Through striving you obtain the purification of heart from any object other than God, and you become totally absorbed in the task of confirming your will to his". Then he added, "This is the true meaning of ‘there is not god but God’. Purify the heart from anything other than God is the denial (there is no God), whilst absorbing oneself in obedience to God is the affirmation (...but God)". "O Master", I rejoined, this humble creature is in some small measure preoccupied with God, but to practice continual fasting is virtually impossible. The climate of Delhi in the summer is notorious; the wind is like a rain of fire. With every breath, one’s thirst increases". "O Dervish", exclaimed Nasiruddin, "If you cannot keep the fast, at least reduce your consumption of food". And then he added, "where do you go to busy yourself with God? To your house, or to some other place?" "In my house" I replied, "there is much disturbance and commotion, but it does not impede me, and if I should be disturbed, I may go out to some garden or isolated spot, under some trees, where I see no one and no one sees me". "And do you not also take along an inkstand and some paper?" enquired the Shaikh, "in order to busy yourself composing ghazals and other forms of poetry? It was not this sort of preoccupation to which I was referring. What is required of you is to preoccupy yourself with God". "Alas" I exclaimed, "you have correctly intuited the whole matter if a line of poetry comes to me, I write it down and then I focus my attention on God again". "If you are able to focus your attention on God (in such a manner)" replied Nasiruddin, "that is commendable, for there is no thicker veil between God and man and no greater impediment to spiritual progress than composing poetry".

In the above passages, Sizji has raised a question relating to a musical gathering and its positive effect on him, whereas Hamid’s issue was one relating to his inability to practice fasting rituals because of a very hot summer. In most circumstances, mention of music in one’s life comes at a time when one

33 Ibid. 18th Assembly.
is generally satisfied. It shows a positive Sijzi and his time’s economic condition. Qalandar’s problem on the other hand is very personal. Even when, as mentioned in the last chapter, Sijzi started writing the words of his master, he had the feeling of bringing happiness and solace to others through this collection. Qalander’s personality is quite different. He is struggling with a personal problem, and is not well off in his life. In these quotes, both disciples were confessing their frustrations to their respective spiritual guides. There can be seen a difference in the nature of problems Sijzi remarks that he will not be able to get solace in prayer of any kind but the *sama*. Qalandar’s personality is different in a sense that he was not able to perform rituals giving an excuse of season. He says Delhi is very hot and its air is burning, a poor excuse not expected from a dervish.

It is also interesting to note the responses from the two saints. Nizamuddin turns the discussion away from Sijzi’s problem to a generalized depiction of *sama*, Nasiruddin on the other hand, dwells on the spiritual inadequacies of Qalander, concluding that even the accommodation he has made between ascetical and creative impulses is ill founded and unacceptable. Though part of the difference in tone between these two passages should be imputed to the uneven talents of their respective authors, one cannot rule out the profound effect and influence that the socio-economic condition of the periods they
represent had on these individuals, and all who attended the *khanqahs*. It is true that Sijzi excelled as a poet and a Sufi, whilst Hamid Qalander languished on both counts\(^\text{34}\) but the content of the passage still however shows the thinking pattern of both authors.

Nizamuddin explained *sama* and its importance in a generalized way, whereas Nasiruddin explained it on a one to one basis. It can be seen that there is a basic difference in the approach of the saints. Nizamuddin was a visionary whose ambitions were focused on the institutionalization of the Chishti silsila. Nasiruddin, on the other hand, was struggling to save, consolidate or follow the institution established by his master. On the pages of the *Khair-ul-Majalis* there are many stories about problems rooted in poor economic condition. It has been, in the words of Nizami, “soaked in pessimism and frustration”. On the other hand Nizamuddin hardly mentions such problems, clearly financial woes were not as prevalent during his time.

Although, as we have seen, Sufis resisted mingling with high-ranking officials and rulers, Nizamuddin and Nasiruddin weren’t totally untouched by prominent figureheads of their time. Yet, the response and actions from the two saints differed. Whilst Nizamuddin firmly resisted pressure from the *ulema* and the State, Nasiruddin swayed, and buckling under pressure he made

\(^{34}\) Nizami, K.A., in introduction to “*Khair-ul-Majalis*”, p.6.
modifications based on the objections of his opponents. The following describes
the situation that Nasiruddin faced which culminated in the institution of the
*khanqah* being threatened during his *khilafatship*, which would have caused a
mood of uncertainty and instability during his era, especially amongst the
thousands who patronized the many *khanqahs* in and around Delhi. During
Nasiruddin’s time, a religious reform movement started by Ibn Taimiya, found
a place in the Sultanate. Muhammad bin Tughlaq was one of the followers of
the Ibn Taimiya movement. Ibn Taimiya (1267-1328) of Egypt, was against
*khanqah* life, and he sent his disciples to preach in India. The Taimiya
movement found a supporter in Tughlaq who was keen to bind the Sufis to the
State chariot to increase their political power, something which the Chishtis in
particular looked upon as a serious interference in their own affairs. Because of
this there were major tensions between Nasiruddin and Muhammad bin
Tughlaq, which were exacerbated by previous tensions between Tughlaq’s
predecessor Ghayasuddin Tughlaq, who was unsuccessful in obtaining
Nizamuddin’s support. Ibn Taimiya’s ambitious protégé, Imam Abdul Aziz
Ardbeli, visited the court of the Muhammad bin Tughlaq, who was so deeply
impressed by Ardbeli’s oration that he kissed his feet.\(^{35}\) Muhammad Tughlaq

\(^{35}\) Quoted by K.A. Nizami from Alberuni’s Rehla in “On History and Historians of Medieval India.”
hence assisted him in checking what they called, anti-Islamic practices, which put a tremendous amount of pressure on Nasiruddin and his order.

One can get a sense of the economic status of both the Khalji and Tughlaq periods in the *Fawaid-ul-Fuad* and *Khair-ul-Majalis*. A reading of the *Fawaid-ul-Fuad* gives one a feeling of satisfaction, a taste of happiness and sign of prosperity, whilst on the pages of the *Khair-ul-Majalis* there are many stories about economic distress. Nasiruddin lived in Delhi during both regimes and experienced the economic structure from both periods from the point of view of the common man. In one assembly he compared the prices of goods between the two periods – of Alauddin Khalji and Firoz Shah Tughlaq. He says that goods during Khalji’s time were very cheap\(^{36}\) and then explained his argument with these statistics:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Wheat} & : 7.5 \text{ jitals/maund} \\
\text{Sugar} & : .5 \text{ dirham} \\
\text{Ordinary sugar} & : 1 \text{ jital/maund} \\
\text{Cloth and other articles} & : \text{also cheap.}\(^{37}\)
\end{align*}
\]

His reference to these ‘minor things’ in detail shows his concern about the common people and their hardships. If there was over all prosperity, as

\(^{36}\) “*Khair-ul-Majalis*”, p.185 and 240

\(^{37}\) Ibid., p.185
purported by Afif and Barani, it is unlikely he would have addressed these issues in detail.

Alauddin Khalji has been projected as an imperialist and ambitious king by contemporary writers like Barani and Afif. They have depicted Alauddin as a “godless” king. The Khair-ul-Majalis describes Khalji in quite a contrasting manner. The so-called imperialist and cruel monarch, who abandoned Jalaluddin Khalji’s theory of benevolence and humanitarianism, is depicted as a very popular king. The Khair-ul-Majalis asserts that the people of Delhi had a very high opinion of Alauddin Khalji, particularly due to his social welfare initiatives, which no contemporary historian tells us, and which created a place for him in the hearts of people. Nasiruddin says that after Khalji’s death, people would visit his grave and tie threads on it in order to get their prayers granted by God. Nasiruddin himself had deep respect for the Sultan and used to add ‘Rahmat-ullah alaihe’ (May the blessing of God be on him) with his name.

There are two opinions about the market policy of Alauddin Khalji. One led by historians like Ziauddin Barani who asserts that it was instituted because Khalji wished to recruit a large army to check the Mongol’s aggression and

\[38\] Chandra, Satish, “Medieval India: From Sultan to the Mughals” p.76.


\[40\] Ibid p.241.
expand his empire, and that the market reforms were part of Khalji’s general policy to impoverish the Hindus so that they would cease to harbour thoughts of rebellion.

The other opinion can be derived from the *malfuzaat*. In fact the *Khair-ul-Majalis* provides a range of reasons for the implementation of Khalji’s market policy. Those discussing this market policy within the *khanqah* would have viewed Barani’s ‘impoverished Hindus’ justification as illogical. Nasiruddin’s account exemplifies this. The following piece of information was gathered from a close noble of Khalji, Qazi Hamiduddin Malik-ut-Tujjar. Nasiruddin and Hamiduddin were gathered in Awadh for dinner, and Hamiduddin relayed his conversation with Khalji. This excerpt is based on the discussion that Hamiduddin had with Khalji regarding the Sultan’s policies and his subjects:

"...The Sultan said: Listen! For sometime my mind in exercised over a problem. I say to myself: O thou! God has placed thee over so many people. Something should be done for the benefit of all mankind. I asked myself as to what should I do: If I distribute all the treasures that I have and even if these are multiplied ten times and are given to the people, it will not suffice for all people; If I distribute land - villages and vilayats - it will not reach all. I was brooding over this problem as what to do for the benefit of all people. This moment an idea has come to my mind. I mention it to you. I told to myself that I should reduce the price of grain, which would benefit all people. And how the prices of corn can be brought down? I

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41 Chandra, Satish, "Medieval India: From Sultan to the Mughals" p.81
42 Ibid. pp81-82.
will issue an order that all those naiks who bring corn to the city from all sides be summoned. Some of them bring ten thousand bull-loads and some twenty thousand. I will summon them and give them robes and silver from treasury and will give them the expenses of their houses and ask them to bring corn and sell it at the price that I fix." So he gave orders accordingly. Corn came from all sides. Within a few days its price came down to seven jitals a mound..."\(^\text{43}\)

Unlike Barani's argument - controlling potential Mongol invasion and punishing Hindus - this story gives a completely different picture. Hamiduddin tells Nasiruddin how much the Sultan was disturbed that he was not able to serve his subjects well, and it was this concern for his people's welfare that led to the birth of the market reform policy. This argument has proven valid by the Sultan's popularity among his subjects. Nasiruddin condoned Khalji's market policy as such that he blessed him and said, "may God bless his soul."\(^\text{44}\)

According to malfuzaat, social relations between Sufis and citizens were by and large harmonious. The Sufi ideology of humanism and brotherhood, accepting everyone without exception, was a way of removing sin and suffering from society and further strengthened the bonds they had with people. Nizamuddin's relations with non-Muslims was determined by two basic postulates of his social outlook. First that all human beings are the children of

\(^{43}\) "Khair-ul-Majalis", p. 241.
\(^{44}\) Ibid p. 242.
God on earth. And second, that one should adopt the ways of God in his dealings with human beings. As the bounties of God - sun, rain and earth - do not discriminate and are available to all, a human should not discriminate when serving others. Sufis were such broadminded and loving leaders, an astounding antithesis to their ulema brothers, that people worshipping non-Muslim gods can be read about in their discourses. One morning Nizamuddin was walking on the roof of his Jamaat khana. On looking down he found Hindus worshiping idols on the bank of the river Jumna. He remarked: “Har qaum raast rahi dineh wo qibleh ghahi”. (All people have a religion and a house of worship). An orthodox Muslim would have criticized, if not forcibly stopped, the ‘pagan’ or un-Islamic practice in their neighborhood, but Nizamuddin had the grace and acceptance to not only comment that every one has his own way of practicing religion, but even explained the importance of tolerance. The above excerpt also tells us that non-Muslim idol worship was alive and practicing at the door of the khanqah, and Nizamuddin pleads to his followers to learn from them rather than shun them.

Issues such as equality, the status of women, the rights of the less privileged – all concerns that are reflected in the Prophet’s message – were

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45 “Fawaid-ul-Fuad”
47 Ibid.
diluted and generally not in practice during the Sultanate period. For example, it took several measures to liberate women from age-old norms of repression and exploitation, but even after 700 years of revolutionary measures, people of the Islamic state of Delhi could not break through their traditional outlook. The birth of a girl child was not appreciated, and there were many problems relating to the marriage of girls. But there are also some instances of women gaining recognition for worthwhile work. Information of this kind can only be sourced from malfuzaat. There is one such woman whom Nizamuddin discussed in his khanqah which was recorded in the Fawaid-ul-Fuad. This woman was known as Fatima. Baba Farid, Nizamuddin’s spiritual master, had a very high opinion of her. Here is a piece of the discussion in which Nizamuddin mentions his master’s words of praise for this woman:

“... began to comment on numerous benefits that accrue from the virtue of women. He called to a woman from Indraprasth named Fatima. She had been such a model of chastity and virtue that Shaikh-ul-Islam Fariduddin- may God sanctify his lofty secret - used to say repeatedly of her: “That woman is a man whom the creator has sent to earth in the bodily form of a woman!”⁴⁸

There are two points of note in this passage. A woman visiting a khanqah shows that even women had faith in the khanqah as a place they could go to and be listened to and given counsel. The second point of note is the perception of

⁴⁸ As discussed by B. B. Lawrence in “Fawaid-ul-Fuad”, p.103
women in that society. Baba Farid compares Fatima’s work to a man’s, as a man in the bodily form of a woman. Fatima, a virtuous woman doing a commendable job is described as a man, as if only men are capable of doing good work. This shows the typical mentality of the period and it’s thinking about women, even amongst the most arguably liberal and broadminded community of people during that time. Indeed, Baba Farid was expressing the current attitude towards women whilst addressing the masses.

In contrast, a Sufi’s attitude regarding woman can be seen with an analysis of the following excerpt from the *Fawaid-ul-Fuad*:

"...The master then declared that dervishes who ask saintly women and saintly men to intercede on their behalf should invoke saintly women first.... 'When a wild lion comes into an inhabited area from the forest', he explained, 'no one asks: 'is it male or female?' Similarly, the sons of Adam, whether they be men or women, must devote themselves to obedience and piety.""^{49}

In this anecdote, Nizamuddin clearly states that gender is irrelevant, that apart from biological and physical differences, there are no difference between men and women. That the practice of spiritualism and virtuous living have nothing to do with biological differences. This was quite radical thinking of the time regarding the emancipation of woman. Even as early as the fourteenth

^{49} Ibid.
century, we come across a man spreading the message of gender equality, and praising the female, a rarity in the patriarchal society of the sultanate.

Marriage of a girl was also one of the pressing concerns for the masses during this period. The visitor, referred to in the last chapter, who was in trouble because he had 'four girls and no money to marry them', is an indicator of a couple of issues of the era. One, that expenditure in marriage may include dowry, which for Muslims was an unusual feature of the marriage ritual, and two, the birth of girls was not celebrated.

Expenditure relating to the marriage of a girl was a social problem, as can be seen in the following story, which also supports the earlier hypotheses of the position of girls in society. An old man called Malih, had come with his several daughters. Only one of them was married.

"... Malih who was an old man of mine, brought a number of daughters to see the master... "What is this?" "One of his daughter has just married," I replied... "Everyone who has one daughter enjoys a barrier against Hell, and you have four!" the master said "The father of daughters is well endowed."\(^{50}\)

Nizamuddin heard Malih with full concentration to his problem. After listening to him, and as per his approach, he generalized the issue related to having girls. His long discussion on this issue wrapped up with a concluding

\(^{50}\) Ibid. p.103, Facile Four, Assembly 41.
remark about the importance of having daughters. He gave them a religious reason why one should be happy and proud of being a father of a daughter ("barrier against Hell"). As many Islamic rituals were intended to boost the individual’s chances of an after-life in heaven, Nizamuddin meant that having a daughter is more beneficial than sons in relation to the "other world", that is, life after death. This is a good example of Nizamuddin’s endeavour to solve a social problem with religious reasoning which the supplicant could relate to.

Quoting his master Baba Farid, Nizamuddin once gave his followers a lecture on the importance of being like a pious and elderly woman:

'Every sorrow and pain that befalls a person he should know, or try to know its source'. Then the master told a story of a pious, elderly woman, about whom Shaikh Fariduddin had told him. She would say repeatedly that: "If a thorn pricks my foot, I know from where it comes."51

He then reiterated how much the Prophet respected women, and spoke about the Prophet for whom three things were most dear - perfume, women and a touch of collyrium in prayer.52 The plight of women then in the sultanate period was urgent and considered by Sufis as a priority, and as it can be seen through these extracts, they were sincerely trying to solve it.

51 Ibid., p.333.
52 Ibid.
Despite the unconventional status ascribed to Fatima, and Nizamuddin’s promotion of women to have equal status of men, women still held a very traditional position in the sultanate period. In the following anecdote a group of women have been depicted carrying out traditional duties filling their pitchers with water from a tank. However this menial task was considered by the Sufi dervish as an exhilarating experience, close to “spiritual bliss”. The dervish told of his experience in Gujarat to Nizamuddin:

“A dervish who has gone to Gujrat narrated this. In Gujrat he met a mystic overpowered by ecstasy. He stayed with him. One night he went to a tank for ablution. The guardian of the tank did not allow anyone to step in but since he had some acquaintance there, he was allowed. A number of women were standing there with pitchers. An old woman asked him to fill her pitcher. Then one after other several women gave their pitchers to him and he filled them all. When he returned to his cell, he found the mystic fast asleep. As soon he started prayer, he woke up and shouted: “Why all this fuss? Real work (of spiritual bliss) was to fill pitchers of women.”^53

According to the malfuzaat, life for common people was relatively hard during this era. They were dying of hunger, there was no social security, and we read that government employees were cruel to the common man.^54

“Nobody in this world” says Nizamuddin, “has as many sorrows and worries as I have. So many people come to me and tell me about their worries, which make my heart bleed.

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^53 “Fawa'id ul-Fu'ad” p.103, p176.
^54 Ibid. p. 147
How can a man listen to so many worries and remain unaffected?" He further adds, "This morsel sticks in my throat when I think that in the streets of Delhi and on the balconies of shops, some people are sleeping who have not taken anything last night."

In the heart of the Delhi sultanate, the condition of Nizamuddin’s people was far from ideal. Nizamuddin’s concern would have been heightened with his awareness of the poor conditions amidst the self-asserted ‘egalitarian’ and religious Delhi sultanate. Delhi was the capital of a kingdom whose kings related themselves with the Caliph and at times would receive robes of honour from Baghdad, the seat of Caliph. They often cited religious justifications to their plans and policies. Islam dictates that any follower of its doctrine, ruler or subject, is required to spend at least 2\(\frac{1}{2}\)% of their earnings on the poor around them, and it is a well known principle of the religion that one should not eat before checking that their neighbours have something to eat first.

In a society of inequality, corruption flows. It seems during the life and time of Nasiruddin corruption was common. This is articulated in the *Khair-ul-Majalis*. Nasiruddin was in pains to witness corruption and gave many such sermons on living an honest and dignified life:

- Livelihood should be earned through strictly honest means.
- Businessmen should be honest in their dealings, and should never utter lies.

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55 Ibid. p.207.
56 Ibid. p.207.
57 Holy Quran, Surah 4/162 p231.
58 "*Khair-ul-Majalis*", p. 91.
Profiteering leads to ruin.\textsuperscript{60}

A man should be an honest and trustee.\textsuperscript{61}

Nasiruddin’s sermons on corruption were relevant to his preaching on violence. In a corrupt and discriminative society, violence is inevitable. Both saints showed a concern about violence in society, and their comments about staying calm and suppressing anger indicated that many people visited the saints with violence and anger-related problems. Nizamuddin said:

“If a man places a thorn in your way and you place another in his way, there will be thorns everywhere.”\textsuperscript{62}

He advised his disciples to be good even to their enemies, and recite the following verses of Shaikh Saifuddin Bakharzi when their natural tendencies would get the better of them:

“He who is not my friend, may God be his friend, and he who bears any ill against me, may his joys increase. He who puts thorns on my path on account of enmity, may every flower that blossom in the garden of his life be without thorns.”\textsuperscript{63}

Nizamuddin’s discourses on the practice of pacifism and non-violence were a tonic for perturbed followers. There are several instances when he talked

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid, p. 95.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid, p. 95.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid p. 209.
\textsuperscript{62} “Fawaid-ul-Fuad”, 35\textsuperscript{th} assembly of 2nd fascicule, 26 rabi-al-awwalah, 712, p147.
\textsuperscript{63} “Fawaid-ul-Fuad”, 17\textsuperscript{th} assembly of 4th fascicule, 16\textsuperscript{th} sumad-al-akhirah, 715, p237
about forgiveness and large heartedness as the supreme talisman for human happiness. In one instance he said:

"If one man vents his wrath on another and the second man is patient, the vivacious attitude belongs to him who is patient and not to the one who gives vent to his wrath." 64

He advised his disciples to suppress anger and channel it through positive thought and action.

"Forgive the person who has committed a wrong and thus eliminate your anger" was his advice." 65

One day a person addressed him:

"People speak ill of you from the pulpits and elsewhere, we cannot bear hearing it any longer". The Shaikh replied, "I forgive them all. You too should forgive them." 66

Forgiveness rather than retribution was the way to peace and happiness in social relations.

The above quotes are only a few of many discourses where non-violence has been emphasized, which would indicate a concern for the intensity of violence during the sultanate period.

Environmental concerns it seems were a topic of concern even as far back as the fourteenth century. Replying to a question of the master, Sijzi comments

64 "Siyar-ul-Auliya", p552.
65 "Siyar-ul-Auliya", p552.
in one excerpt from the *Fawaid-ul-Fuad* that he was coming from the army compound. In response to a second question, he said that he would go to the city once every ten to twelve days, otherwise he stays in the army compound and say congregational prayer at the Kilogarhi mosque. To this Nizamuddin replied:

"That is the right thing to do, since the air is better in the army compound than in the city, and the city is also filthy."  

Interestingly, this conversation points towards an environmental condition of fourteenth century Delhi, and its comparison with the suburban area of the military cant.

The author is cogniscent that he has only barely touched on *malfuzaat* texts as a history source, yet it is clear that even from the information in this one chapter, *malfuzaat* are not just religious texts for those wanting to learn about Sufism, or those already practicing Sufism to utilise as a guide book. Apart from discourses relating to religious and spiritual practice, we came across a vast array of information from slavery and gender equality, to economics and the environment, and we can see that there was little disturbance in the social fabric of the common people due to changes in government, and issues within

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67 Ibid, p.211  
68 Ibid. p.211
the courts of kings. Books written during the sultanate period by authors such as Afif and Barani discuss life during that period, but to what degree are they narrowly focused on a minority elitist population that we are left with a biased view of society during the era? The next chapter reviews some key texts of the sultanate period as a contrast to *malfuzaat*, and will show that *malfuzaat* must be considered as supplementary reading to these texts for a more rounded view of this period.