

The Chishti Khanqah as a Socio-Religious Institution in Medieval India: Space, Authority, and Everyday Sufi Practice, c. 1200 –1600

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Abstract

The khanqah - the residential Sufi hospice that combined the functions of teaching institution, hostel, almshouse, and devotional assembly-hall was among the most influential and least formally documented institutions of medieval Indian religious life. This article examines the Chishti khanqah as a socio-religious institution in North India and the Deccan between approximately 1200 and 1600, drawing on the established historiography of Indian Sufism together with the genre of malfuzat (recorded discourses) that remains the richest contemporary source for its social history. The article develops a functional-spatial model of the khanqah, comprising the jama'at-khana (congregational hall), langar (communal kitchen), guest quarters, ziyarat/tomb precinct, and the khilafat-nama (deputyship) mechanism through which the institution reproduced itself across generations and regions, and situates this model against the doctrinal Chishti preference for futuh (unsolicited alms) and tawakkul (trust in God) over in'am (state land grants). Tracing the silsila from Mu'in al-Din Chishti's settlement at Ajmer (c. 1192) through Nizam al-Din Auliya's Delhi khanqah at its early-fourteenth-century apex to the post-1350s regional dispersal of khilafat into the Deccan, Bengal, Malwa, and Gujarat, the article argues that the Chishti khanqah functioned simultaneously as a site of vernacular religious mediation, an alternative locus of moral authority to the Sultanate court and the ulama-dominated madrasa, and a mechanism of social incorporation across caste and communal boundaries while cautioning against the romanticized 'syncretism' narrative that recent historiography has increasingly problematized. The analysis engages critically with the long-standing 'myth of decline' thesis regarding post-fourteenth-century Chishti Sufism, arguing, in line with revisionist scholarship, that institutional dispersal following Nasir al-Din Chiragh-i-Delhi's death in 1356 reflected geographic diffusion and adaptive continuity rather than terminal decline. The article concludes by identifying source-critical and methodological directions for future research on khanqah institutional history, including underused revenue and endowment records and comparative regional case studies.

Keywords: Chishti Sufism; Khanqah; Medieval India; Delhi Sultanate; Malfuzat; Sufi historiography; Sama'; Religious institutions

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1. Introduction

Among the institutions that shaped the religious and social landscape of the Delhi Sultanate and its successor states, few were as pervasive, and as historiographically contested, as the Sufi khanqah. Literally the 'abode' or hospice of a Sufi master, the khanqah combined in a single physical and institutional space the functions that in other traditions were often dispersed across separate structures: a residence for the shaikh and his family, a teaching and devotional hall (jama'at-khana) for disciples and visitors, a kitchen (langar) dispensing food without distinction of rank or creed, and, after the shaikh's death, a tomb-shrine (dargah) that became the focus of pilgrimage and periodic commemoration (urs). Of the several Sufi silsilas (orders) active in the Indian subcontinent from the twelfth century onward, the Chishtiyya achieved the widest social penetration and left the most enduring institutional and cultural imprint, so much so that it has been described as the most widespread and popular Sufi tradition in South Asia since Mu'in al-Din Chishti's settlement at Ajmer at the close of the twelfth century (*Ernst & Lawrence, 2002*).

The historiography of the Chishti khanqah, however, has long been shaped by two competing tendencies that this article seeks to hold in productive tension. The first, associated above all with the foundational institutional history of *K. A. Nizami (1961)*, reads the Chishti khanqah as a site of principled distance from the Sultanate court — the shaikh's refusal of in'am (state land grants) and office read as evidence of a moral authority that quietly checked, even as it coexisted with, temporal power. The second, associated with the broader social-historical turn represented by *Eaton (1978, 2003)* and subsequently refined by *Digby (1986, 1990)*, treats the khanqah less as a moral counter-institution than as one node within a wider and more entangled economy of authority, land, and patronage, in which Sufi shaikhs, however rhetorically opposed to worldly wealth, were nonetheless deeply implicated in agrarian expansion, frontier settlement, and the legitimation of political rule. A third, more recent historiographical intervention, most explicitly articulated by *Ernst and Lawrence (2002)*, has challenged the long-standing 'myth of decline' according to which Chishti Sufism is presumed to have lost its vitality after the death of the fourteenth-century Delhi shaikhs, arguing instead that the geographic dispersal of khilafat (spiritual deputyship) into the Deccan, Bengal, Gujarat, and Malwa after 1356 represented institutional adaptation and regional efflorescence rather than terminal decline.

This article synthesizes and critically extends this historiography by developing an explicit functional-spatial model of the Chishti khanqah as a socio-religious institution, tracing its formation and generational transmission through the principal Delhi-Ajmer lineage, and examining its subsequent regional dispersal across medieval India. In doing so, the article addresses three specific objectives: first, to systematize, in a single analytical framework, the institutional vocabulary and spatial-functional anatomy of the khanqah as it emerges from the malfuzat and secondary historiography; second, to trace the succession and geographic diffusion of the principal Chishti khanqahs from Mu'in al-Din Chishti's Ajmer establishment (c. 1192) through the early-fourteenth-century Delhi apex under Nizam al-Din Auliya to the post-1356 regional dispersal; and third, to evaluate, against the most recent historiography, competing interpretations of the khanqah's relationship to state power, its role in cross-

communal religious life, and the historiographical 'decline' thesis. The remainder of the article proceeds as follows: Section 2 reviews the relevant historiography in greater depth; Section 3 develops the institutional and conceptual framework; Section 4 presents the historical analysis of Chishti khanqah formation and expansion; Section 5 discusses the khanqah's relationship to state, society, and gender, together with a critical assessment of the syncretism and decline narratives; and Section 6 concludes with directions for future research.

2. Literature Review

The modern academic study of Indian Sufism rests on an institutional-historical foundation laid chiefly by *K. A. Nizami (1961)*, whose study of religion and politics in thirteenth-century India remains the starting point for any account of the early Chishti khanqah. Nizami's reading of the Chishtiyya emphasized the order's principled refusal of land grants and court office as the basis of a distinctive moral authority that, he argued, allowed the khanqah to function as a check upon, rather than a mere adjunct of, Sultanate power; this thesis was extended in his subsequent biographical and institutional studies and has continued to shape the framing of Chishti historiography for over six decades (*Nizami, 1961*). A near-contemporary and complementary survey was provided by *Rizvi (1978)*, whose multi-volume history of Sufism in India remains the most comprehensive single reference work on the successive silsilas active in the subcontinent, situating the Chishtiyya within a broader comparative account of the Suhrawardiyya, Qadiriyya, and later Naqshbandiyya orders.

A significant methodological reorientation was introduced by *Simon Digby (1986, 1990)*, who examined the Sufi shaikh as a competing source of authority within medieval Indian political culture, arguing that the relationship between shaikh and sultan was characterized less by the clean moral separation that Nizami's framework implies than by an ongoing and often tense negotiation over claims to legitimate authority, in which miracle narratives (*karamat*) and the shaikh's control over sacred space served as instruments of a distinctively religious form of political capital. This reading was substantially reinforced by *Richard Eaton's (1978)* social-historical study of the Sufis of Bijapur, which shifted analytical attention from doctrinal history to the concrete social roles performed by Sufi khanqahs — as arbitrators of local disputes, patrons of agrarian expansion, and brokers between rural populations and expanding state power — a framework Eaton subsequently generalized in his synthetic account of India's Islamic traditions (*Eaton, 2003*) and, in a parallel study of the Bengal frontier, extended to the agrarian and frontier dimensions of Sufi institutional expansion in the eastern subcontinent.

The most influential recent intervention in Chishti historiography is undoubtedly *Carl Ernst and Bruce Lawrence's (2002)* study, which offers a sustained critique of what the authors term the 'myth of decline' — the long-standing assumption, present in both Orientalist and Muslim-nationalist historiography alike, that Chishti Sufism reached its zenith under Nizam al-Din Auliya and thereafter entered irreversible institutional decay. Ernst and Lawrence instead reconstruct the post-1356 history of the order as one of active regional dispersal, in which khilafat-holders carried Chishti institutional forms into Gujarat, Malwa, the Deccan, and Bengal, generating new khanqah centres — most notably Sayyid Muhammad Gesu

Daraz's establishment at Gulbarga — that adapted Chishti practice to distinct regional political and religious contexts rather than merely repeating a Delhi-centric template. *Bruce Lawrence's* (1978) earlier survey of the malfuzat and biographical literature of pre-Mughal Indian Sufism remains indispensable for establishing the primary-source base — chiefly the malfuzat genre inaugurated by Amir Hasan Sijzi's record of Nizam al-Din Auliya's discourses — upon which much of this institutional history depends.

A further strand of scholarship has interrogated the khanqah's relationship to gender and everyday devotional practice. *Scott Kugle* (2007) has examined the corporeal and performative dimensions of Sufi sainthood in South Asia, while more recent ethnographically grounded historical scholarship on women's participation in shrine culture has complicated an earlier historiography that largely treated the khanqah as a male institutional space, showing instead that women were active, if unevenly documented, participants in devotional life at Chishti shrines from the medieval period onward. Recent historiographical reflection, notably *Yogesh Snehi's* (2019) fieldwork-based study of popular Sufi shrines in the Indian Punjab, has further cautioned against reading the 'secular' or syncretic character of shrine culture as a transhistorical given, arguing instead that such characterizations are themselves the product of specific twentieth-century historiographical and political projects rather than a straightforward description of medieval religious practice — a caution this article takes seriously in its own treatment of Chishti syncretism in Section 5.

Finally, a comparative and global-historical literature has situated the Indian khanqah within the wider institutional history of Sufism across the Islamic world. *Nile Green's* (2012) global history of Sufism traces the khanqah's institutional antecedents to the eastern Islamic lands of the tenth and eleventh centuries, while broader recent surveys of Sufism in India and Central Asia (*Khan, 2022*) and continuing regional case studies of the Chishti order (*Chowdury, 2024*) confirm the sustained international scholarly interest in the Chishtiyya as a comparative case of institutional Sufism. Notwithstanding this substantial body of work, comparatively few studies have attempted to synthesize the khanqah's institutional anatomy — its spatial organization, its revenue basis, and its mechanism of generational and geographic reproduction through khilafat — into a single explicit analytical framework capable of being applied comparatively across the different phases and regions of Chishti expansion; this is the gap the present article seeks to address.

3. Conceptual Framework and Method

3.1 Sources and Method

This article is a work of historiographical synthesis and institutional analysis rather than a primary archival study, and it draws its evidentiary base from three overlapping categories of source material as mediated through the secondary historiography reviewed above. The first and richest category is the malfuzat (recorded discourses) genre, epitomized by Amir Hasan Sijzi's *Fawa'id al-Fu'ad*, recording the table-talk of Nizam al-Din Auliya between 1308 and 1322, which remains, in the assessment of successive generations of historians from Nizami to Lawrence, the single most valuable source for the everyday social history of the Sultanate-period khanqah. The second category comprises *tazkira* (hagiographical/biographical compendia) and later chronicle literature, read critically for their institutional rather than

purely devotional content. The third comprises the analytical secondary literature synthesized in Section 2, which this article treats as itself a historiographical object of analysis, particularly in its evolving treatment of the khanqah's relationship to state power and the contested 'decline' and 'syncretism' theses addressed in Section 5.

3.2 A Functional-Spatial Model of the Khanqah

Drawing on the institutional vocabulary consistently identified across the reviewed historiography, this article proposes a functional-spatial model of the Chishti khanqah organized around six recurrent elements, summarized schematically in Figure 2 and Table 1. At the institutional centre stood the shaikh (pir), whose personal authority (wilayat, or spiritual 'territory') radiated outward through five interlocking structures and practices: the jama'at-khana, the large congregational hall that served as the primary venue for teaching, communal prayer, and, most distinctively for the Chishtiyya, the sama' (audition) — the controversial practice of devotional music-assembly that Chishti masters defended, and rival scholars and orders frequently contested, as a legitimate path to spiritual absorption; the langar, the communal kitchen funded through futuh (unsolicited offerings) rather than solicited endowment, whose free distribution of food irrespective of caste, creed, or social rank has been read by successive historians as a key mechanism of the khanqah's broad social appeal (*Nizami, 1961; Rizvi, 1978*); guest quarters (musafir-khana) accommodating travelling disciples and petitioners; the ziyarat or tomb precinct that, following the shaikh's death, transformed the khanqah into a dargah and the focus of the annual urs commemoration; and the khilafat-nama, the certificate of spiritual deputyship through which a shaikh authorized senior disciples to establish satellite khanqahs elsewhere, the principal institutional mechanism by which the order reproduced itself geographically across successive generations.

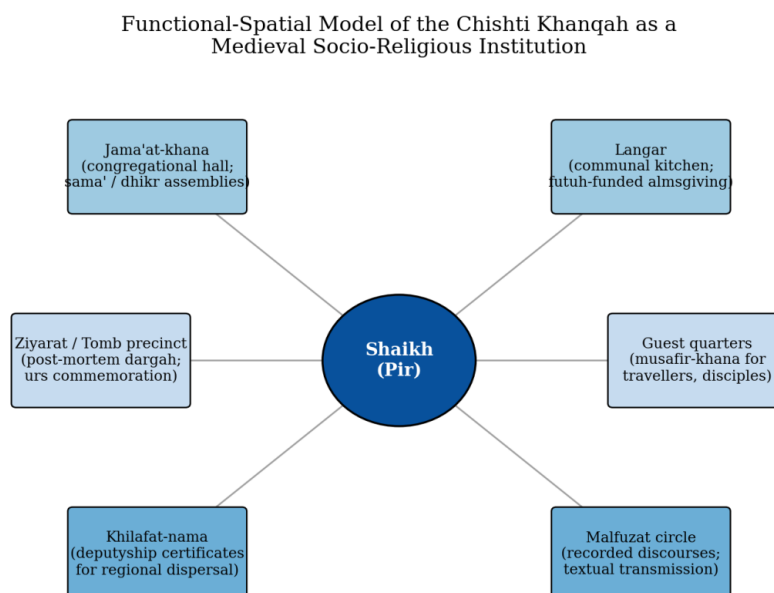


Figure 2. Functional-spatial model of the Chishti khanqah as a medieval socio-religious institution, synthesized from the malfuzat and institutional historiography reviewed in Section 2.

3.3 Doctrine and Economy: Futuh, Tawakkul, and the Rejection of In'am

A distinguishing doctrinal feature of the early Chishti khanqah, and one central to Nizami's foundational institutional reading, was its principled preference for futuh — unsolicited offerings received without demand — over in'am, the formal land grants and revenue assignments that the Sultanate state extended to religious institutions including rival Sufi orders such as the Suhrawardiyya. This preference was underwritten by the doctrine of tawakkul, or total trust in divine providence, which counselled against the accumulation or hoarding of wealth and, in Chishti hagiographical memory, distinguished the order's ethical posture from that of the courtly ulama and the landed Suhrawardi khanqahs of Multan and Uch. It is important, however, following the more critical readings advanced by Digby and Eaton, not to overstate the practical consistency of this doctrine: the historical record shows considerable variation across individual shaikhs and generations in the degree to which futuh-based tawakkul was maintained in practice, and later Chishti establishments, particularly in the regional courts of the fifteenth-century Deccan and Malwa, increasingly accepted forms of state and elite patronage that the founding generation had rhetorically eschewed.

4. The Chishti Silsila in Medieval India: Formation and Expansion

4.1 Foundation: Mu'in al-Din Chishti at Ajmer

The Chishti silsila in India is conventionally dated to the settlement of Khwaja Mu'in al-Din Chishti at Ajmer at the close of the twelfth century, in the immediate aftermath of the Ghurid conquest of northern India. Ajmer's strategic and symbolic location — a former centre of Rajput political power newly incorporated into the expanding Sultanate — has been read by successive historians as significant to the khanqah's subsequent role in mediating between conquest-state authority and local society. From Ajmer, spiritual authority passed to Qutb al-Din Bakhtiyar Kaki, who established a khanqah in Delhi itself, situating the order for the first time at the political centre of the Sultanate, and thence to Farid al-Din Mas'ud, popularly known as Ganj-i-Shakar, whose khanqah at Ajodhan (present-day Pakpattan) became, in the assessment of the malfuzat literature, a major centre of popular devotion in the Punjab, renowned for its austerity and its accessibility to petitioners across social boundaries. This early succession, illustrated in Figure 1, established the basic institutional template — jama'at-khana, langar, and khilafat-based succession — that later Chishti establishments across the subcontinent would replicate and adapt.

Spiritual Genealogy (Silsila) of the Principal Chishti Shaikhs
in the Delhi Sultanate Period, c. 1192–1356

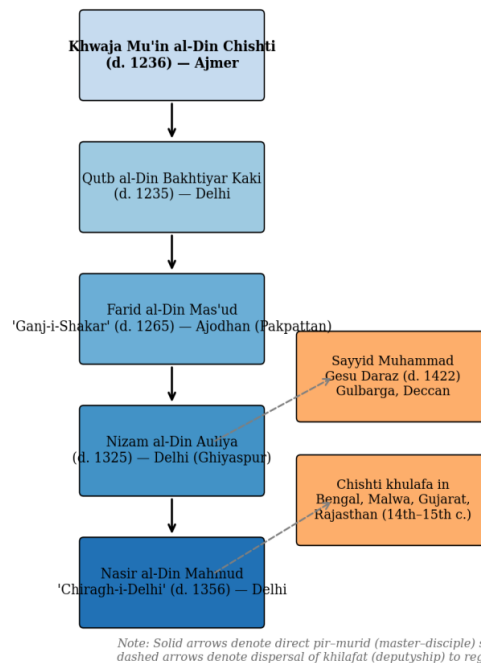


Figure 1. Spiritual genealogy (silsila) of the principal Chishti shaikhs in the Delhi Sultanate period, c. 1192–1356, showing direct master–disciple succession and the post-1350s dispersal of khilafat to regional centres.

4.2 Apex: Nizam al-Din Auliya's Delhi Khanqah

The Chishti khanqah reached its institutional and cultural apex under Nizam al-Din Auliya, whose establishment at Ghiyaspur on the outskirts of Delhi attracted disciples, petitioners, and, according to the biographical record, even members of the Sultanate elite, despite the shaikh's consistent refusal of direct court patronage or office — a stance immortalized in the later historiographical trope that Nizam al-Din Auliya outlived, in institutional if not always cordial terms, seven successive Delhi sultans. It was in this Delhi khanqah that the malfuzat genre reached its most historiographically consequential expression, in Amir Hasan Sijzi's *Fawa'id al-Fu'ad*, which records the shaikh's discourses on subjects ranging from the correct conduct of sama' to the ethics of almsgiving, dispute resolution, and interaction with non-Muslim neighbours, and which remains, as noted above, the primary window onto the khanqah's everyday social function during this period (Lawrence, 1978). The wide social reach of the Delhi khanqah during this period — drawing petitioners from artisan, mercantile, and cultivator backgrounds alongside members of the religious and administrative elite — has been read by Nizami and subsequent historians as central evidence for the Chishtiyya's distinctive capacity for social incorporation, though, as discussed further in Section 5, this reading requires careful qualification against more recent, source-critical historiography.

4.3 Dispersal: Khilafat and the Post-1356 Regional Expansion

The death of Nasir al-Din Mahmud, known as Chiragh-i-Delhi, in 1356 has conventionally been treated, in the older Nizami-derived historiography, as marking the effective end of the classical Delhi Chishti khanqah and the onset of institutional decline. Ernst and Lawrence's

(2002) revisionist account, discussed in Section 2, instead reframes this moment as the beginning of an active phase of geographic dispersal, in which Chiragh-i-Delhi's khulafa (deputies) and those of preceding generations carried Chishti institutional forms outward from Delhi into Gujarat, Malwa, and, most consequentially, the Deccan and Bengal, illustrated schematically in Figure 3. The most historiographically significant of these regional establishments was that of Sayyid Muhammad Gesu Daraz, who relocated to Gulbarga in the Bahmani-ruled Deccan in the early fifteenth century and there established a khanqah that became, in its own right, a major regional centre of Chishti learning and devotional practice, adapted to the distinct political economy and religious demography of the Deccan plateau. Comparable, if less thoroughly documented, processes of regional khanqah formation occurred in Bengal, where Chishti khulafa operated alongside the older Suhrawardi establishments of the eastern frontier described by Eaton's (2003) frontier thesis, and in the Malwa and Gujarat sultanates, where fifteenth-century regional courts extended forms of patronage to Chishti establishments that the founding Delhi-Ajmer generation had rhetorically declined.

Schematic Distribution of Principal Chishti Khanqah Centres
Across Medieval India, c. 1200–1450

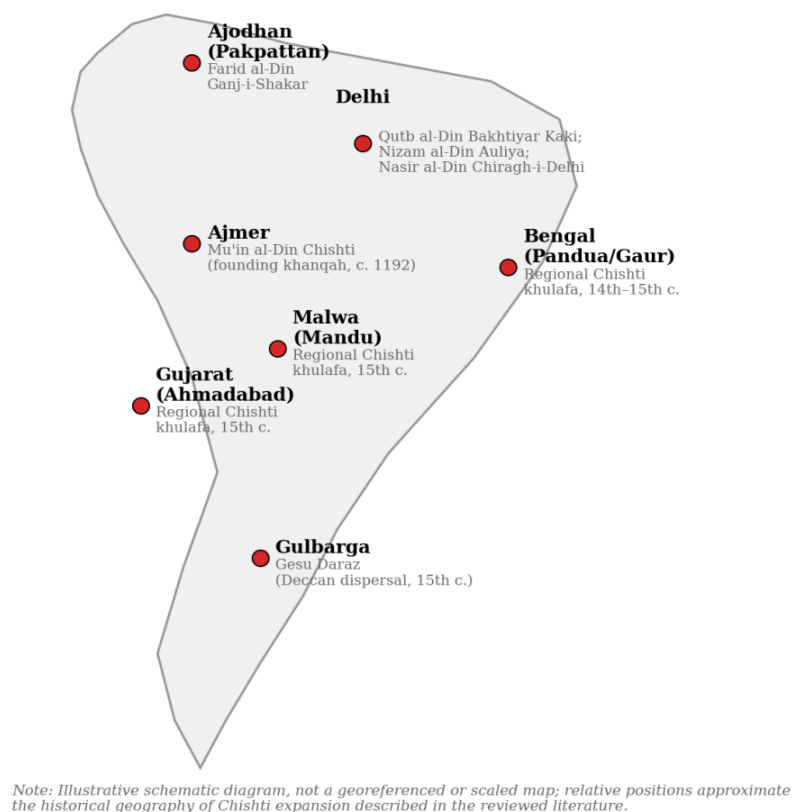


Figure 3. Schematic distribution of principal Chishti khanqah centres across medieval India, c. 1200–1450 (illustrative diagram, not a georeferenced map).

Table 1. Chronology of the principal Chishti shaikhs and khanqah centres in medieval India, c. 1192–1422.

4.4 The Khanqah as Vernacular and Cross-Communal Institution

A recurrent theme across the historiography — from Nizami's earliest institutional studies through Ernst and Lawrence's revisionist synthesis to more recent regional case studies — is the Chishti khanqah's role as an agency of vernacular religious mediation. Chishti shaikhs and their khulafa are consistently credited in the malfuzat and later hagiographical literature with conducting devotional and pedagogical activity in regional vernaculars rather than exclusively in Arabic or Persian, and with incorporating indigenous musical and poetic forms — most notably qawwali, the devotional musical genre closely associated with the sama' assembly — into Chishti ritual practice. This vernacular and musical accessibility, combined with the langar's caste-blind almsgiving, has long been cited as central to the khanqah's appeal across the religiously and socially heterogeneous population of Sultanate-period North India, drawing petitioners, as the malfuzat repeatedly attest, from artisan and cultivator communities including, on the evidence internal to these sources, individuals of non-Muslim background.

Shaikh	Khanqah / Centre	Approx. Dates	Institutional Significance
Mu'in al-Din Chishti	Ajmer, Rajasthan	d. 1236	Founding figure of the Indian Chishti silsila; earliest recorded khanqah
Qutb al-Din Bakhtiyar Kaki	Delhi	d. 1235	First Chishti establishment at the Sultanate political centre
Farid al-Din Mas'ud ('Ganj-i-Shakar')	Ajodhan (Pakpattan)	d. 1265	Punjab devotional centre; extensive malfuzat/tazkira tradition
Nizam al-Din Auliya	Delhi (Ghiyaspur)	d. 1325	Institutional and cultural apex; source of Fawa'id al-Fu'ad malfuzat
Nasir al-Din Mahmud ('Chiragh-i-Delhi')	Delhi	d. 1356	Last of the classical Delhi lineage; khilafat dispersal begins
Sayyid Muhammad Gesu Daraz	Gulbarga, Deccan	d. 1422	Major regional khanqah of the post-dispersal phase, Bahmani Deccan

5. Discussion: Khanqah, State, Society, and Historiographical Reassessment

5.1 Khanqah, State, and the Limits of the 'Moral Distance' Thesis

Table 2 synthesizes the comparative institutional posture of the Chishti khanqah relative to the principal alternative religious institutions of medieval India — the Suhrawardi khanqah, more consistently integrated into the Sultanate's revenue and patronage apparatus, and the madrasa, the formal institution of Islamic legal-theological education typically staffed and controlled by the ulama. Reading across this comparison, the article argues that Nizami's classical 'moral distance' thesis, while capturing an important element of Chishti self-representation and doctrinal preference, requires the qualification introduced by Digby's and Eaton's subsequent scholarship: the Chishti khanqah's authority was not simply a function of its distance from state power but was actively constituted through an ongoing, often ambivalent negotiation with that power, in which the shaikh's very refusal of in'am became, paradoxically, a further source of political and moral capital that the Sultanate elite itself had reason to respect and, at times, to seek proximity to.

5.2 Gender and Everyday Devotional Practice

The institutional historiography surveyed in Section 2 has, until relatively recently, treated the khanqah predominantly as a male institutional space, reflecting both the gendered authorship of the malfuzat and tazkira sources and the historiographical priorities of an earlier generation of institutional historians. More recent scholarship, drawing on ethnographic as well as historical method (*Kugle, 2007*), has begun to recover evidence of women's participation in Chishti devotional life, both as petitioners at the khanqah and, in a smaller number of documented cases, as recognized spiritual figures within or adjacent to Chishti lineages, a corrective that this article endorses as a necessary direction for future primary-source research, discussed further in Section 6.

5.3 Reassessing 'Syncretism' and the 'Myth of Decline'

Two related historiographical narratives require explicit critical treatment. The first is the long-standing characterization of the Chishti khanqah as an agent of Hindu-Muslim religious 'syncretism' — a framing present in earlier institutional historiography and still widespread in popular and heritage discourse. While the evidence for cross-communal participation in khanqah devotional life, particularly at the langar and during sama' assemblies, is well attested in the malfuzat, recent historiography, notably Sneh's (2019) fieldwork-grounded critique, cautions against reading this participation through an anachronistic and often depoliticized 'syncretism' lens that risks flattening the specific historical conditions, asymmetries of power, and doctrinal boundaries that structured cross-communal encounter at the medieval khanqah. The second is the 'myth of decline' addressed at length in Section 2: this article follows Ernst and Lawrence (2002) in treating the post-1356 regional dispersal of Chishti khilafat not as institutional decay but as a second, geographically extensive phase of khanqah formation, whose distinct regional histories — in the Deccan, Bengal, Malwa, and Gujarat — remain, as Section 6 notes, comparatively under-researched relative to the well-documented Delhi-Ajmer core.

Table 2. Comparative institutional posture of the Chishti khanqah relative to the Suhrawardi khanqah and the madrasa in medieval North India.

Dimension	Chishti Khanqah	Suhrawardi Khanqah	Madrasa (Ulama-Controlled)
Economic basis	Futuh (unsolicited alms); tawakkul ethic	In'am (state land grants); revenue assignments	State/elite endowment (waqf)
Relation to court	Rhetorical distance; ongoing informal negotiation	Close institutional integration	Formal legal-administrative integration
Primary mode of authority	Personal (wilayat); sama'-based devotion	Personal plus landed institutional standing	Textual/legal scholarly credential
Social accessibility	Broad; langar open across caste/creed	Narrower; more elite-oriented	Restricted to formal students
Reproduction mechanism	Khilafat-nama (deputyship, geographically portable)	Institutional/family succession, landed	Scholarly lineage (isnad), institutional appointment

6. Conclusion

This article has developed a functional-spatial model of the Chishti khanqah as a medieval Indian socio-religious institution, synthesizing the institutional historiography of Nizami, Rizvi, Digby, Eaton, and Ernst and Lawrence into a single analytical framework organized around the jama'at-khana, langar, guest quarters, ziyarat precinct, and khilafat-nama mechanism, and has traced this institution's formation at Ajmer, its apex under Nizam al-Din Auliya in early-fourteenth-century Delhi, and its subsequent geographic dispersal into the Deccan, Bengal, Malwa, and Gujarat following the death of Nasir al-Din Chiragh-i-Delhi in 1356. Three principal conclusions emerge. First, the Chishti khanqah's institutional durability rested on a replicable spatial-functional template — combining devotional assembly, caste-blind almsgiving, and a portable mechanism of spiritual deputyship — that allowed the order to reproduce itself across radically different regional political economies without a centralized administrative apparatus. Second, the khanqah's relationship to state power is better understood, following Digby and Eaton, as one of active and ongoing negotiation rather than simple moral distance, notwithstanding the doctrinal and rhetorical importance of futuh and tawakkul within Chishti self-understanding. Third, both the 'syncretism' and 'decline' narratives that have long structured popular and, in earlier decades, scholarly understanding of Chishti Sufism require the critical qualification that recent historiography, and this article, extend: cross-communal engagement at the khanqah must be read within its specific historical conditions rather than treated as evidence of a transhistorical pluralist

ethos, and the post-1356 regional dispersal of Chishti institutions is more accurately characterized as adaptive geographic diffusion than as terminal institutional decay.

These findings carry implications beyond the specific case of the Chishtiya. The functional-spatial model developed here — organized around a portable institutional template, a distinctive economic ethic, and a deputyship mechanism of geographic reproduction — offers a framework potentially applicable to comparative study of other medieval Sufi orders and, more broadly, to the comparative institutional history of religious movements that expanded across pre-modern polycentric political landscapes without centralized ecclesiastical structures.

Future research should pursue three directions in particular. First, the underused revenue, endowment (waqf), and land-grant records associated with later, regionally patronized Chishti establishments in the Deccan and Malwa deserve systematic archival investigation, to test more precisely the extent and chronology of the order's departure from its founding futuh-based economic ethic. Second, comparative regional case studies of the post-1356 dispersal — particularly the Bengal and Gujarat establishments, which remain considerably less studied than Gesu Daraz's Gulbarga khanqah — are needed to substantiate the revisionist dispersal thesis with region-specific institutional detail. Third, continued recovery of women's participation in Chishti devotional and institutional life, building on the gender-historical scholarship discussed in Section 5, remains an important corrective to a historiography that has, until recently, been disproportionately shaped by the male-authored malfuzat and tazkira record.

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