

An analysis of institutionalized state patronage to the Khanqah-Dargah complex in the city of Delhi during the medieval period

Dr. Chandni Sengupta

Assistant Professor, Department of History, Amity School of Liberal Arts, Amity University Haryana, Haryana, India

Abstract

The khanqah-dargah complex was an important economic institution in the medieval period. These complexes were patronized by sultans, Mughal emperors and later on by the Indian government. The paper aims at analysing the nature of institutionalized state patronage of khanqah-dargah complexes in the city of Delhi. Many medieval sources throw light on this aspect and the paper aims to analyse the facts presented in these sources.

Keywords: khanqah-dargah, sultans, mughal emperors, delhi

1. Introduction

The city of Delhi was a Sufi nerve centre since the 13th century. The *Masalik ul-Absar fi Masalik ul-Amsar*, a 14th century text written by Shihab ad-din al Umari, mentions that Delhi and its surrounding areas had over 2000 *khanqahs* ^[1]. Therefore, state patronage that was given to these *khanqahs* was a well thought out strategy on part of the Sultans. It was because of the popularity of these *khanqahs* and the fact that lakhs of people associated themselves with these spiritual units, was the main driving force for providing state patronage to them.

Many chronicles have recorded the grants that were assigned to the *khanqahs* by Sultans in the medieval period. Zia ad-din Barani in the *Tarikh i-Firoz Shahi* while mentioning the righteous demeanour of Sultan Ghiyas ad-din Tughlaq claims that he used to give liberal grants to *khanqahs*. Barani also asserts that the Sultan used to send enough funds for the sustenance of all the religious and piety-minded elders ^[2]. Some of the land grants that were made to the *khanqahs* during the initial years of the Turkish rule and a few were later withdrawn and made part of the *khalisa* land. These harsh steps by some Sultans left the *khanqahs* bereft of their right to any share that they were entitled to from the taxes imposed on these lands by the state. Zia ad-din Barani, however, states that during the time of Sultan Firoz, for whom he wrote his great political eulogy, the *Tarikh i-Firoz Shahi*, these lands were given back to the khanqah-dargah complexes and the children/nominated disciples were made the legal heirs of the landed property that was now made to be part of the khanqah-dargah units.

Barani also states that they were given an official *diwani* and also a *farman i-tughra* (a *farman* which was stamped by the Sultan's office) was granted to these units as well as to some other *alims* and *sayyids* ^[3]. According to Barani, the *shaikhs* and those who worked in the dargahs (caretakers and their associates) were given *inam* and *wazifa* by the Sultan who increased the percentage of funds that were to be granted to these sections ^[4].

In yet another reference to the way in which Sultan Firoz tried to facilitate better conditions for the khanqah-dargah

complexes during his reign, Zia ad-din Barani states that many *khanqahs* and shrines in Delhi and in areas surrounding the state capital had been abandoned and were in a rather pathetic condition. Sultan Firoz gave a fresh lease of life to these *khanqahs* by not only repairing the damaged structures but also by assigning them fertile lands along with well-populated villages ^[5]. The people of these villages, therefore, came to revere the saints who lay buried in their ancestral lands.

Shams Siraj Afif in the *Tarikh i-Firoz Shahi* has given a figure of 30,000 *tankas* (silver coins) that were assigned to these *khanqahs* that began to flourish during the reign of the Sultan. Moreover, concessions were also given to those who visited these *khanqahs* from far off areas. He also states that some of the *khanqahs* like those of Shaikh Farid ad-din and Shaikh Nizam ad-din that were in a precarious condition now began to flourish because of the hereditary land grants that were assigned to them by the Sultan ^[6]. Moreover, he states that the Sultan had assigned 36 lakh *tankas* for distribution among the *alims*, *mashaikhs* and other piety-minded individuals ^[7]. He has stated that it was Sultan Firoz who appointed *mutawalis* (caretakers and organizers of ritual events at the shrines) and officials for over 120 khanqah-dargah complexes in the city of Delhi ^[8]. Afif also states that the Sultan got doors made of sandalwood in many shrines of the city and sponsored a project for the beautification of these shrines ^[9].

Although the accounts of these chroniclers are not free from exaggeration it can be ascertained by a reading of these texts that during the Tughlaq period, especially during the period of Sultan Firoz, khanqah-dargah complexes within the city of Delhi were made to flourish. Liberal grants in way of cash and kind were assigned to these centres of piety which now began to develop a structured form. It was in this period, and due to the efforts made by Sultan Firoz, that a specific structure was put in place in many of these khanqah-dargah complexes.

As stated by Barani and Afif, the two famous chroniclers of the medieval period, the grant of hereditary lands and *farmans* that were issued to this effect were instrumental in preparing a

definitive structure for the *khanqah-dargah* complexes in the city. In the Mughal period, *suyurghal* grants were given to the men of learning, Sufis, the needy and others who depended on the state for their survival. These grants accounted for a fair share of the government expenditure.

Abul Fazl in the *Ain i-Akbari* gave an elaborate description of the four categories of people on whom the *suyurghal* was conferred—first, on enquirers after wisdom who withdrew themselves from all worldly occupations and made no distinction between night and day time in searching for true knowledge; second, on those who toil and practice self-denial, and while they engage in the struggle with the selfish passions of human nature, they renounced the society of men; third, on those who are weak and poor, and have no strength for inquiry; fourth, on honourable men of gentle birth who from want of knowledge were unable to provide for themselves by taking up trade ^[10]. He also makes a distinction between the allowances paid in cash (*wazifa*) and lands conferred (*milk* or *madad i-maash*). Such stipends and grants were placed under the supervision of the *Sadr* who was assisted by other officers for discharging his duties efficiently ^[11]. Irfan Habib has provided an estimate of the percentage of revenue that was given away as *suyurghal* in the Mughal period. According to him the total amount of revenues alienated through these grants ranged from nearly 2 per cent to above 5 per cent in different provinces under Akbar ^[12]. A large part of these *suyurghal* grants were assigned to Sufi *khanqahs*.

Shireen Moosvi in her work on the economy of the Mughal Empire, has calculated that the four *subahs* of Agra, Delhi, Awadh, and Allahabad together contained more than 50 percent of the total *suyurghal* grants in the country during the Mughal period ^[13]. She suggests that in the *subah* of Delhi (based on *pargana* figures) the *suyurghal* as percentage of *jama* was 5.497 percent. Her calculation also suggests that in 20 out of the 213 *parganas* in the *sarkar* of Delhi, the *suyurghal* exceeded 10 percent of the *jama* ^[14].

Abu Fazl in the *Ain i-Akbari* has mentioned that in the *subah* of Delhi which consisted of eight *sarkars*, out of the total revenue collected i.e. 123,012,590 dams, 10,990,260 dams were given away as *suyurghal* ^[15]. Estimates given in the *Ain i-Akbari* suggest that in the old suburban district of Delhi out of the 1,422,451 dams collected as revenue by the state, 306,460 were granted as *suyurghal*. In the new suburban district of Delhi out of 3,635,315 dams, 595,984 were assigned to *suyurghal*. In the metropolis of Delhi out of 736,406 dams collected as revenue by the state, 18,783 were granted in the form of *suyurghal* ^[16]. In Palam out of the 5,726,787 dams collected as revenue, 1,231,880 were granted as *suyurghal*. The table given below provides a complete estimate of the percentage of *suyurghal* grants in the four important *mahals* of Delhi *sarkar*. These *mahals*, as their name suggests, were perhaps the revenue *mahals* covering the surrounding villages of the urban settlements of Delhi. Since they were in the form of land grants, we notice that in the metropolis of Delhi they were merely 2.5 per cent. This was very meagre as compared to the other suburban areas (even Palam was an area adjacent to the suburban part of Delhi). The scholars, religious men, Sufis, etc., who resided in Delhi were given land grants in villages around it only. The grants that were given in the metropolis were probably in the form of cash which was always a small proportion of the total land revenue grants assigned for religious and charitable purposes.

Table 1: Grant of *suyurghal* in urban area *mahals* in Delhi *Sarkar*

S. No.	Area	Total Revenue	Suyurghal	Percentage
1.	Old Suburban	1,422,451	306,460	21.54%
2.	New Suburban	3,635,315	595,984	16.39%
3.	Metropolis	736,406	18,783	2.55%
4.	Palam	5,726,787	1,231,880	21.51%

From the table given above it appears that in the old suburban, new suburban and Palam area, and the metropolis of Delhi, the overall percentage of *suyurghal* was high while in the *mahals* in the rural areas of *sarkar* Delhi *suyurghal* was comparatively very low.

During the later part of the 16th century (when the *Ain i-Akbari* was compiled in 1595 AD) the capital of the Mughal state was Agra, and Delhi had lost its importance as a major power centre. Despite this, the percentage of *suyurghal* grants seems to be much higher in the urban areas of Delhi than in the *subah* of Agra. According to figures given by Shireen Moosvi the *suyurghal* as percentage of *jama* in the *subah* of Agra (based on *pargana* figures) was 3.992 percent while in Delhi, as mentioned earlier, it was 5.497 percent ^[17]. This could have been due to the presence of large number of Sufi *khanqahs* in the city of Delhi.

The state's willingness to provide rent-free grants to Sufi establishments in this period was to a large extent based on the personal allegiance the emperor owed to these saints and their shrines. As already discussed, Mughal Emperor Akbar had a lot of regard for Sufis and paid visits to shrines whenever he had an opportunity. The same was true of Emperor Jahangir, Shah Jahan and Prince Dara Shikoh later on. A substantial part of the grants given as *madad i-maash* might have gone to the Sufi shrines in Delhi which had a long history in the city.

From British Gazetteers of the 19th century it becomes clear that even under the British rule there were some rent-free grants or *maafi* (of land revenue) that were granted to religious institutions. The procedure to be adopted as far as *maafi* for religious establishments was concerned was given in a letter dated 29th October 1872 from the Secretary to Financial Commissioner, to Commissioner, Delhi (letter No. 7481) ^[18]. It needs to be mentioned here that all these *maafi* assignments were grants of land revenue only and that ownership over the land remained with the government. They were grants not of land but land revenue only ^[19].

The procedure mentioned was that "in the case of grants under 10 *bighas* for religious or charitable purposes, included in the separate register of such grants, it will be necessary only to ascertain that the grants are still applied to such purposes, and that the area entered in the register is not exceeded ^[20]. From an abstract of the *Maafi* Registers of the Delhi District it is clear that a total of 150 land tenures were granted as *maafi* for religious and charitable purposes out of a total of 937 land tenures granted as *maafi* in 1883-84. Therefore, the *maafi* given for religious and charitable purposes accounted for 16 percent of the total land tenure granted as *maafi* in the Delhi district.

As the flow of grants became steady and continuous, there were people who were assigned responsibilities to take care of proper utilization of these grants. It is within this context that one can place the class of *khadims* and *sajjadas*. In the case of the shrine of Nizam ad-din Auliya it may be seen that while the latter claimed to have a more direct connection with

the *pir*, the former established themselves as caretakers of the shrines who were well-versed with all the ritual ceremonies that were to be conducted from time to time.

2. References

1. Zaki M. (ed.), Arab Accounts of India during the Fourteenth Century, Idarah i-Adabiyat i-Dilli. 1981, 21.
2. Zia ad-din Barani, Tarikh i-Firoz Shahi. Translated in Hindi from original Persian by S.A.A. Rizvi, Tughlaq Kaleen Bharat, Hindi Department, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, 1956, 2:1.
3. Ibid, 2.
4. Ibid, 22.
5. Zia ad-din Barani, Op cit, 23.
6. Ibid, 23.
7. Shams Siraj Afif, Tarikh i-Firoz Shahi. Translated in Hindi from original Persian by S.A.A. Rizvi, Tughlaq Kaleen Bharat (part I), Hindi Department, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, 1956, 86.
8. Ibid, 134.
9. Ibid, 135.
10. Fazl, Abul, Ain i-Akbari. Translated from the original Persian by Col. H.S. Jarrett, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd, New Delhi. 1977; 1:278.
11. Fazl, Abul, Ain i-Akbari. 1977, Op cit, 1:278.
12. Habib, Irfan. Essays in Indian History: Towards a Marxist Perception, Tulika Books, New Delhi. 2001, 100.
13. Moosvi, Shireen. The Economy of the Mughal Empire c. 1595: A Statistical Study, Oxford University Press, New Delhi. 1987, 159.
14. Ibid, 159-60.
15. Fazl, Abul, Ain i-Akbari. Translated from the original Persian by Col. H.S. Jarrett, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd, New Delhi. 1978, 2:291.
16. Fazl, Abul, Ain i-Akbari. 1978, Op cit, 2:292.
17. Moosvi, Shireen. 1987, Op cit, 159.
18. Gazetteer of the Delhi District, compiled and published under the authority of the Punjab government, 1883-84, Vintage Books, 1988 (second edition), 175.
19. Delhi Gazetteer, Gazetteer Unit, Delhi Administration, Delhi, 1976, 592.
20. Gazetteer of the Delhi District, Ibid, 176.