

**Politics of Religion in the Sovereign City Delhi Under the Khaljīs  
(690-720/1290-1320)**

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In the fourteenth century, the political relations in the sovereign city of Delhi were patrimonial and were governed through the patron client matrix. The sultan was a patron for the social and political base of the Delhi Sultanate that he actively created and modified in order to win greater political support. The Khaljī sultans were not as religious as their predecessor slave dynasty or successor Tughluq dynasty. The religious groups under Sufis and 'ulamā' became more powerful in Delhi and the popular politics they initiated was unprecedented. Present article delves into the politics of religion and explains how the religious elite was able to gather as much support on the streets during the Khaljī era.

**Keywords:** Delhi, Delhi Sultanate, 'ulamā', Sufis, Sultans

Delhi was developed as a patrimonial town (Weber, 1978) by the Delhi Sultans (605-801/1206-1399). The sultans actively constructed the social base and political base of the sovereign city (Ahmed, 2016) by patronizing émigrés, slaves, religious groups including 'ulamā' and Sufis. (Chughtāī, 1952; Habib, 1992) The sultans developed patrimonial relations with their subjects living in the capital city of Delhi and personalized rewards and punishments. These patrimonial relations facilitated centralization of authority for the sultan who became more powerful as a consequence (Ahmed, 2019). Present article takes into account the data from primary sources and postulates that Sufis and 'ulamā' were important stakeholders in the politics of Delhi city under the Khaljī dynasty who brought politics on the streets. Nonetheless, the popularity among the masses could never make the religious groups powerful enough to topple the militarily strong Khaljī sultans.

The Delhi Sultanate religious elite hailed from a confraternity that was visibly diverse and connected across the ever fluctuating medieval political borders. However, this fraternity was peripatetic, interconnected and was religious and intellectual in character (Raḥmān, 1970; Kumar, 2007). The thirteenth century was an epoch of ordeals and upheavals for many Muslim polities in Persia, Central Asia, and Arabia owing to the Mongol invasions. Yet these political cataclysms provided social and political bases to the Delhi Sultanate in the form of refugees and émigrés that considered Delhi Sultanate a safe haven. The Sultanate of Delhi historian Minhajus Siraj Juzjani in his seminal work

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called this nascent polity “the asylum of the universe” for Muslim administrative and intellectual elite fleeing from the Mongol onslaught (Chughtai, 1952).

This newly arriving religious elite was the backbone of state administration in the Delhi Sultanate and was responsible for legal and educational issues in addition to religious matters. They were also consultants of the Sultan since they guided the sultan about legal, religious and political matters and explained to the sultan how to deal with the non-Muslim subjects and make their rule appear legitimate in the eyes of the social and political base (‘Afif, 1938). The *ulamā*’, with their religious acumen, helped define social rules for the Muslim social and political base as their aim was to give people awareness about how to formulate their lives according to the principles of Islamic law.

In addition to their services in the administration, the Sultans needed the *‘ulamā*’ to solve theoretical issues central to their legitimacy and offer guidance in how to deal with their non-Muslim subjects. The religious knowledge of the *‘ulamā*’ also provided guidelines to the Muslim populace to formulate their lives according to the *sharī‘a*. The *‘ulamā*’ were employed in almost all departments of the Sultanate’s administration: In the departments of justice (*dīwān-i-qaḍā*) as the chief judge (*qāḍī al-qaḍā*). These intellectuals also served as diplomats and emissaries due to their respect given to them in the royal courts. They were in charge of policing and served as *shahna/kotwal* (police). They served as market inspectors (*muhtasib*) and were responsible of fair dealings between consumers and traders. They were in charge of public morals through the office of accountability and public morals (*hisba*). They managed the education (*tadrīs*) of Muslims and oversaw vast networks of *madrassahs*. They were also trustees of charitable endowments and public works (*awqāf*) (Ahmad, 1941; Day, 1934; Qureshi, 1942). They were intellectuals who wrote histories of the Delhi Sultanate, it was rare but there were examples that they headed armies. They were consulted in the larger architectural projects as they were consulted while deciding the calligraphic scheme of Qur’anic *āyats* (verses) that were to be inscribed in the monuments. The content of these Qur’anic *āyats* reflected the sultan’s political opinions (Welch et al., 2002).

In the Delhi Sultanate, educational and religious institutions replicated the semi-bureaucratic structure of other medieval Muslim polities. The *ulamā* of the Delhi Sultanate regulated the *madrassah* education. In the *madrassahs* the *ijazah* served as authorization, and concluded with *dastar* (turban) and *sanad* (certificate). The *madrassahs* were responsible for a process of socialization and communication that connected the students and developed in the form of a community. Personal piety was considered an important source of an *‘alim*’s credibility; in theory, the residents of the Delhi Sultanate recognized two categories: *ulamā*, *ulamā’i haqq* (truth scholar) and *ulamā’i sū* (scholar seeking vested interests) (Nizami, 2002). In practice, these categories were not definitive. Many *ulamā*, sought government positions and earned the reputation as *‘ulamā’i sū*. The ruler befriended the *ulamā’i haqq*, and tried to make matrimonial alliances with them. Hardly ever did the sultan persecuted the *‘ulamā*’ but public punishment or execution of some *‘alims* and Sufis was also recorded.

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The role of the '*ulamā*' under the Khaljī dynasty became more complex as rifts within their ranks, as well as tensions between the '*ulamā*' and Sufis, became more pronounced. The Khaljī Sultans were not as religious as their predecessors or successors. The Khaljī dynasty was founded on controversy, after Khaljī Afghans murdered the reigning sultan, Balaban's grandson Mu'izz al-Dīn Kayqubād, and seized the throne. Many of Delhi's residents sided with the Turkish *umarā*' of the Balaban era; indeed, their opposition was so strong that the newly enthroned Sultan Jalāl al-Dīn Khaljī could not enter Delhi for a year.

The trial of Sīdī Muwallih in the era of Jalāl al-Dīn Khaljī is a case that helps to explain the colliding networks of '*ulamā*', as well as how in this era, Sufis, '*ālims*, and administrators formed powerful factions. Sīdī Muwallih hailed from Central Asia and was the leader of a heterodox denomination of Muslim wandering dervishes (Muwallih) (Ḥaq, n.d). He settled in Delhi in the reign of Sultan Mu'izz al-Dīn Kayqubād, where he built a large *khānqāh* (hospice). Sultan Kayqubād's murder was resented by the population of Delhi, and the new ruler, Jalāl al-Dīn Khaljī, begrudged the fact that Sīdī Muwallih's *khānqāh* was visited by many deposed administrators and officers of the Balaban era. The affluence, charity and lavishness of the *langar* (public kitchen) came from unknown sources that raised many eyebrows. Moreover, Sīdī Muwallih had won the hearts of both the masses and many of the notables of Delhi through his performance of miracles. Nonetheless, he was seen with suspicion by many orthodox '*ulamā*' and by members of a rival sect (Haydarī *qalandars*), who accused him of hatching a conspiracy for regicide in order to enthrone himself as *khalīfa* (Ḥaq, n.d; Bhatti, 1974; Baranī, 2004). In addition to the Crown Prince *Khān-i Khānān* and *qāḍī* of Delhi Jalāl al-Dīn Kashānī, Balaban's Hindu officers (*pahilwāns*) Hathya *payak* and Niranjan *kotwāl* sided with him (Bhatti, 1974; Baranī, 2004). The *qāḍī* of Delhi, Jalāl al-Dīn Kashānī, had been serving in the role since the previous regime and was son of an '*ālim*' named Quṭb al-Dīn Kashānī (Ḥaq, 2004; Bhatti, 1974; Baranī, 2004). The historian Ḍiya al-Dīn Baranī mentions him as a '*fitnaparwar*' or a strife-monger who was transferred to Badaun as *qāḍī* after the incident (Ḥaq, 2004; Bhatti, 1974; Baranī, 2005). A Mongol commander named Malik Ulghu reported the conspiracy to the sultan's younger son Arkalī Khān. Though the allegations were never proven, the sultan demanded that Sīdī Muwallih walk on fire in order to prove his innocence. However, the '*ulamā*', especially officers of the justice department, dissuaded the sultan by arguing that fire does not distinguish between the innocent and the guilty. Jalāl al-Dīn ordered Sīdī Muwallih's rivals, the Haydarī *qalandars*, to stab him with a knife, and later Prince Arkalī Khān had the wounded Sufi trampled under an elephant's foot. Orthodox '*ulamā*' like Ḍiya al-Dīn Baranī attributed the later misfortunes of Jalāl al-Dīn Khaljī's reign including drought and famine to Sīdī Muwallih's unjust murder (Habibullah., 1970; Isami, 1348; Ḥusayn, 1938; Chishti, 1982.; Riazul, 2002).

The next ruler, 'Alā' al-Dīn Khaljī (695-715/1296-1316), faced rebellions and dissent immediately after his ascension to the throne. In 1299, the generals of Aladdin, Nusrat Khan and Ulug Khan also rebelled near Jalor. In 1301, 'Alā' al-Dīn Khaljī, the new reigning monarch, encountered three popular uprisings. The first uprising was led by his nephew Akat Khan, who attempted to murder the Sultan during a hunting expedition

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in Tilpat Haryana. (Saksena 1992) Akat Khan was given capital punishment as a consequence of his conspiracy. ( Lal, 1950)

The second conspiracy was led by his sister's sons Malik Umar and Mangu Khan. The rebellion happened in the region of Awadh in the provincial army as the nephews tried to recruit a rebel army by recruiting soldiers. The aim of this rebellion was to oust 'Alā' al-Dīn Khaljī's government in Awadh (Lal, 1950). This rebellion if successful would have financially impacted the Delhi government. However, the uprising was suppressed by 'Alā' al-Dīn Khaljī's loyal officers, and the rebels were executed. (Saksena 1992)

The third uprising was organized by a slave official from Delhi named Haji Maula. The Sultan was not in the capital and a vast majority of people relied around Haji Maula (Lal, 1950). This street power of Haji Maula and unpopularity of 'Alā' al-Dīn Khaljī's officers seemed like a severe threat for the Khaljī dynasty. Nonetheless, Haji Maula was suppressed by the confidant of 'Alā' al-Dīn Khaljī Malik Hamiduddin. The rebels were taken to task and harsh punishments were given to them (Saksena 1992).

In order to counter the reoccurrence of rebellions Sultan 'Alā' al-Dīn Khaljī consulted his confidants and ministers in order to devise strategies to curb resistance. The sultan after consultation took the following measures to prevent further uprisings (Saksena 1992).

First, he established a secret service and surveillance network to preempt any occurrence. Second, he controlled all the socialization of his nobility so that they could not join hands and make common causes against the Sultan. Third, he made the financial conditions of the nobility of Delhi weak by confiscating most of their properties. Thus, the sultan deprived the nobility the leisure for interest aggregation and interest articulation and thus controlled them with iron hands. After taking these measures, there was no major uprising during 'Alā' al-Dīn Khaljī's reign ( Lal, 1950).

Sultan 'Alā' al-Dīn Khaljī was not as religious as many of his predecessors. However, three '*ulamā*' were very close to the sultan, namely, *qāḍī* Muḡhīth al-Dīn Bayanwī, Mawlana Zahīr Lang, and Mawlana Mashīd Kuhrāmī, who accompanied the sultan at his food table and on sojourns (Bhatti, 1974). Despite their intimacy with him, these '*ulamā*' nonetheless feared the sultan for their lives. The sultan debated with *qāḍī* Muḡhīth al-Dīn about issues like treatment of Hindus by Muslim rulers, the question of *jizya*, and who, according to Islam, is a just ruler. The *qāḍī* remained invariably reluctant to reply, since he feared the wrath of the sultan in case his opinion offended him. The argument concluded with the sultan saying that the '*ālim*'s views were unrealistic as his knowledge lacked practical wisdom (Bhatti, 1974; Barani, 2005; Ḥasanī, n.d).

Despite the fact that 'Alā al-Dīn Khaljī did not promote religious groups in the manner of his predecessors, there remained a visible presence of multiple networks of '*ulamā*' in Delhi, including teachers like Mawlānā Iftakhār al-Dīn Rāzī, Mawlānā Iftakhār al-Dīn Baranī, Mawlānā Tāj al-Dīn Kalāhī and Tāj al-Dīn Muqaddam Dihlawī

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(Bhatti, 1974; Barani, 2005; Hasanī, n.d.). Mawlānā Badr al-Dīn Awadhī and Mawlānā Burhān al-Dīn Bhakarī were also important teachers of this era (Bhatti, 1974).

‘Alā’ al-Dīn Khaljī transferred a significant number of ‘*ulamā*’ from their positions. For example, *Shaykh al-Islām* Quṭb al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Ḥasanī’s son Tāj al-Dīn was the *qāḍī* of Karh and belonged to a renowned family of *qāḍīs*. However, he was transferred from Karh to Badaun by ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Khaljī, where he spent rest of his life. His nephew Rukh al-Dīn was made *qāḍī* of Karh on place (Bhatti, 1974; Baranī, 2005).

In this era, the Chishti Sufi Shaykh Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā’ (635-725/1238-1325) had devotees among the ‘*ulamā*’, members of the royal family, other segments of *umarā*’, and the popular classes and was known with the titles *maḥbūb-i Ilāhī* (beloved of God) and *sultan-al mashāyikh* (Gaborieau, 2000). The sultan at one point became apprehensive that Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā’ had political ambitions, however perhaps recognizing the risk he never challenged the Sufi (Khurd, Saiyyid Muhammad ibn Mubarak. ‘Alawi Kirmānī, *Siyar al-Awliyā*’, ed. Chiranji Lal, Originally composed 1351-82 A.D., (Khurd, 1885; Anjum, 2014). Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā influenced his disciples’ decisions to accept or reject government positions. For instance, a *khalīfa* (successor) of Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā’, Muḥyi al-Dīn Kāshānī, who came from a family of *qāḍīs* in Awadh, was appointed *qāḍī* of Awadh by Sultan ‘Alā al-Dīn. This appointment severed the *qāḍī*’s relation with his mentor, who withdrew the *khilāfat* from him. Later the *qāḍī* resigned from his official post to restore his relationship with the Sufi (Bhatti, 1974; Baranī, 2005; Ḥaq, n.d; Ḥasanī, n.d).

Religious groups in Delhi Sultanate were divided between the Sufis and the ‘*ulamā*’, however these categories often overlapped. Sufi-‘*ulamā*’ tensions in the Delhi Sultanate were made manifest in the debate on the legality of *samā*’ (devotional music) (During, 2005). The Chishti Sufis, headed by Shaykh Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā’, believed that it was *ḥalāl* to use music and dance in Sufi *maḥfils*. However ‘*ulamā*’ like Shaykh ‘Umar Sunāmī, a Ḥanafī preacher, and jurist *qāḍī* Jalāl al-Dīn Walwājī, considered it *ḥarām* (Bhatti, 1974; Baranī, 2004; Ḥaq, n.d; Ḥasanī, n.d). There were some Balaban era ‘*ulamā*’ like Shaykh Burhān al-Dīn Balakhī who considered *samā*’ as a great sin, however they could not resist it (Bhatti, 1974). Instances abound of disagreement between Sufi and ‘*ālim*’ converting to a Sufi worldview. Shaykh Dāwud b. Ḥusayn b. Maḥmūd of Shiraz (also known as Zayn al-Dīn) had traveled to Hijāz (c. 701/1301) before settling in Daulatābād. He was initially against *samā*’, however later he reversed his attitude and became a disciple of Burhān al-Dīn Hanswī (Bhatti, 1974). Mawlānā Fakhr al-Dīn Zarādī was also against *samā*’ but later changed his views (Bhatti, 1974; Kirmānī, 1885).

Sultan ‘Alā’ al-Dīn patronized some ‘*ulamā*’ and bestowed upon them largess and privileges in exchange of their support. While generosity towards religious groups was seen as an important duty of a sultan, many refused to receive such help. Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā’ was offered villages by ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Khaljī multiple times, but he refused (Bhatti, 1974). The sultan admired Shaykh abu ‘Alī Qalandar (605-724/1209-1324), a

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veteran Sufi-*‘ālim* who had brought a large number of locals into the fold of Islam, but who would not accept his grant (Bhatti, 1974). Therefore, the sultan took help from Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā’ and Amīr Khusraw as mediators, and the grant was eventually accepted. Likewise, Shaykh Ṣadr al-Dīn Kuhramī of Delhi not only avoided the sultan and his officials but also refused the sultan's offer for a grant of 10,000 dinars and villages (Bhatti, 1974; Ibn Baṭṭūta, 1986).

An incident relating to Khwāja Shams al-Dīn Turk reflects two themes; how territories were assigned to *‘ulamā’* and Sufis assigned by their mentors missions to reach out to masses and conflict resolution between different *‘ulamā’*. Khwaja Shams al-Dīn Turk came and settled in Panipat where Shaykh Abu ‘Alī Qalandar had already established himself. Shams al-Dīn sent a glass full of milk, a symbolic gesture carrying an implied meaning: I have been allotted this territory by my Shaykh and there is no space left here for another religious figure. Shaykh Abu ‘Alī Qalandar returned the cup of milk with rose petals floating on top, indicating that he would live in the area without interfering in Shaykh Shams al-Dīn Turk's activities. Because of this both the intellectuals maintained cordial relations with each other (Bhatti, 1974).

The case of a famous Egyptian *‘ālim* (*muḥadith*- expert of *ḥadīth*), Mawlānā Shams al-Dīn Turk who come to India along with his collection of four hundred books in ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Khaljī 's era shows how an *‘ālim* could gain the attention of the sultan, as well as how existing members of the bureaucracy sought to guard against such approaches (Bhatti, 1974). Shams al-Dīn Turk stayed in Multan with Faḍal ullah b. Shaykh al-Islam Ṣadr al-Dīn. During his stay, he wrote two books: the *Sharāḥ-i Ḥadīth* (exegeses), and a journal in Persian. The journal was an assessment of ‘Alā’ al-Dīn's governance. While the *‘ālim* appreciated the sultan's policies towards Hindus, he criticized the sultan's appointments in religious positions, especially the post of *qāḍī*. He observed that *muftis* issued *fatāwa* (plural of *fatwā*) after taking bribes. He was of the view that the sultan should not give preference to *fiqh* as *ḥadīth* should be the prime source of Islamic jurisprudence (Islam, 2005). Although Turk's *Sharāḥ-i Ḥadīth* reached the sultan, the journal was deliberately not conveyed by the sultan's secretary. Later, the sultan learned of the journal, but to his dismay Shams al-Dīn Turk had already left India (Baranī, 2004; Bhatti, 1974). From statements in his journal it seems that Shams al-Dīn Turk was making a case for his own appointment in the government administration as *muḥadith*, but his efforts were blocked by existing officers (particularly the secretary Bahā’ al-Dīn Dabīr).

The life of Abu al-Ḥasan Yamīn al-Dīn (Amīr) Khusraw (652-725/1253-1325) offers a vivid illustration of the fact that there were many *‘ulamā’* who not only survived periods of political transition but also saw an increase in their position and influence with each passing year. Amīr Khusraw was a Sufi-*‘ālim* and a disciple of Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā’ who had connections with Sufis, *‘ulamā’* and rulers. In his long career as a poet, author, musician, historian, royal counsel, administrator, and military commander he survived more than eight transfers of power. Amīr Khusraw's career saw an unremitting rise because of his extraordinary talents (Sharma, 2005).

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The case of Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā' best explains how the personal grudges of a sultan could pose a serious threat even to a well networked sufi- 'ālim . The nominated heir of 'Alā' al-Dīn Khaljī, Prince Khiḍr Khān a disciple of Niẓām-al Dīn, was deposed by 'Alā' al-Dīn Khaljī's *nā'ib* (deputy) Malik Kāfūr in the last days of the sultan's reign. Malik Kāfūr (who had attained great power at the court) enthroned a minor son of the deceased sultan while having Khiḍr Khān blinded and another prince, Quṭb al-Dīn Mubārak Shāh (r. 716-720/ 1316-1320), imprisoned. Mubārak Shāh, who had a rivalry with Prince Khiḍr Khān, nonetheless survived. He had Malik Kāfūr (r. 720/1320) killed and ascended the throne. The new sultan, who was the last ruler of the Khaljī dynasty, not only had Khiḍr Khān and his other brothers executed but also persecuted all of Prince Khiḍr Khān's supporters, including Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā' . The sultan had gathered support from some '*ulamā'* that he awarded offices and largess. Shaykh Faḍl. b. Muḥammad Multānī was appointed as *nā'ib wazīr* and Mawlānā Ḍiya al-Dīn b. Mawlānā Bahā' al-Dīn who was the son of sultan's teacher, was appointed as *Ṣadr-i jāhān* with a title of Qādi Khān. As a token of acknowledgment, he was given a gold dagger that was studded with jewels (Bhatti, 1974; Kishori, 1950; Saksena, Habib; Nizami). The sultan tried to publicly isolate Niẓām al-Dīn by prohibiting his *umarā'* from visiting Niẓām al-Dīn's *khānqāh* in Ghiyathpūr. In the same period, a new mosque, the *Maṣjid-i Mīrī*, was constructed. It was made mandatory for all the Sufis and '*ulamā'* to perform their prayers there. Niẓām al-Dīn did not comply with these orders. It was customary for the '*ulamā'* and Sufis of Delhi to assemble at the royal palace and offer prayer with the sultan on the first of each month. Niẓām al-Dīn instead of attending this ceremony sent his servant as a delegate. This angered the sultan who asked Niẓām to either pay homage or be ready to bear serious consequences. Nonetheless, Niẓām refused to heed the orders (Khusraw, 1933; Rizvi, 2012). A few days later Mubārak Shāh was callously murdered by his Gujarati slave-general and protégé Khusraw Khān (r. 720/-1320), who proclaimed himself the sultan. In order to neutralize his image as a usurper and win the support of the people and notables of Delhi, Khusraw Khān distributed money from the royal treasury generously (Saksena, n.d). Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā' accepted the donations made by this new sultan who lasted only two months on the throne. Later, this acceptance of Khusraw Khān's grant damaged relations between Niẓām al-Dīn and the next ruler of Delhi, Ghiyāth al-Dīn Tughluq (r. 721-725/1321-1325). The sultan demanded that Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā' return the donation, however the money had already been spent. The passive hostility of Ghiyāth al-Dīn Tughluq against Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā' is an important chapter in the history of the Delhi Sultanate.

### Conclusion

In the Khaljī era the politics came to the streets of Delhi and the social base of the Delhi considered Sufis and '*alims* important role models that were followed. The famous Chishti saint Niẓām al-Dīn Awaliyah was known as the sultan of hearts while 'Ala al-Dīn Khaljī was known as the sultan of army. There were popular rebellions and intrigues in this era where common people rallied around the rebel leaders however, despite all the popular support these rebellions ended in failure because of 'Ala al-Dīn Khaljī's military prowess.

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