Tension, Emotion, and Devotion:
Master-Disciple Relationships and Consolidation of a *Ṭarīqa* in Medieval India

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Introduction

In an article on the early history of sufism, Malamud pointed out that crucial practices and organizations, such as the ritual of *bayʿa* between a master and disciple, the concept of lineage (*silsila*), the bestowal of the *khirqa*, teaching *dhikr*, and the rules for communal life in a *khānqāh*, were developed in Khurasan, especially Nishapur, between the late 10th century and the 11th century. All of these practices involve a master-disciple relationship, which became "more formal but more intensely personal [Malamud 1994: 438]," simultaneously with the development of institutionalized sufism.[1] Then, in the 12th and 13th centuries, sufism took another step toward institutional development and the formation of the urban sufi brotherhood (*ṭarīqa*) [Malamud 1994]. Following this framework, this article tries to analyze the process of consolidation of a sufi *ṭarīqa* in Medieval India, namely Chishtis.

The Chishtis has been a dominant sufi order in the Indian subcontinent since the Delhi Sultanate period. Its eponym is not a person but a small town in present-day Afghanistan where a family of sufi masters called *khwājagān-i Chisht* resided. The order was introduced in the subcontinent at the beginning of the 13th century. We know very little about the distinctive teachings and training methods of early Chishtis as no masters before the 13th century recorded anything about them. Chishti masters during the Sultanate period used *ʿAwārif al-maʿārif* by Shihāb al-Dīn ʿUmar Suhrawardī as a principal text. A fondness for *samāʿ* (meditation with music) is often considered as a characteristic feature of Chishtis, but *samāʿ* was practiced widely by sufis of other orders during the Sultanate period, as Chishti literature itself records [SA (D): 505–525].[2] The significant feature of Chishtis during the early Sultanate period is that their affiliates yielded works such as *Fawāʾid al-fuʾād*, a *malfūẓāt* of the famous master Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyāʾ, and *Siyar al-awliyāʾ*, a biography of the Chishti masters down to Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyāʾ, by which the discussion of this article is enabled. Judging from the Chishti literatures mentioned above, Chishtis in India seem to have been consolidated as a sufi group through common practices of sufism listed by Malamud, without the establishment of distinct methods/practices in mystical trainings.

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1 This change in a master-disciple relationship seemingly corresponds with the transition of the way a master guides a disciple, which Meier discussed as the transition from *shaykh al-taʿlīm* to *shaykh al-tarbiya* based on the examples of sufis in Nayshabur from 9th to 11th centuries [Meier 1971 (1999)].

2 For history of Chishtis during the Delhi Sultanate period and in general, see [Rizvi 1978: 115–189; Ernst and Lawrence 2002]. For discussions on the Chishtis and *samāʿ*, see [Ernst and Lawrence 2002: 34–45; Schimmel 1980: 14].

By the Delhi Sultanate period, the practices and organizations such as the *bayʿa* ritual, the lineage, the bestowal of the *khirqa*, teaching *dhikr*, and the *khānqāh*, had largely become standard features of sufism. In this article, two practices involving a master-disciple relationship that worked for the consolidation of Chishtis are discussed: The *bayʿa* ritual that formalizes the master-disciple relationship, and the gatherings (*majlis*) held by a sufi master. Next, the article describes how a Chishti master Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyāʾ exemplified the model of ideal disciples, being obedient and devotional to the master, in the gatherings with invoking emotions. Then, the process of consolidation of the Chishti *ṭarīqa* through these practices is analyzed. The article also experimentally applies a set of "thinking tools" of the Bourdieusian theory of practice to this analysis, based on an assumption that sufism emerged as a distinct field through the practice and organizations discussed by Malamud. The article proposes the application of the concepts as follows: Sufism as a field, that is, a "social space" — for example, of politics, education, arts, science — which is relatively autonomous from other fields and has its own unique set of beliefs, rules, practices, and capital. *Ṭarīqa* as *habitus*, a set of acquired dispositions of thought, behavior, and taste, and also the product of the *habitus*.[3]

I. *Bayʿa*, the Concept of Lineage and Deputyship

Bayʿa, in a broad sense, is a pledge or oath between a person and those who accept his authority. In sufism, it is usually performed as an initiation ritual when an aspirant accepts the authority of a sufi as a master and thus becomes the disciple and enters a mystical path. After the *bayʿa*, the master and disciple are connected with a special bond. *Bayʿa* consists of a series of ritualistic moves and formulas. The most common ritual is a master taking a disciple's hand and making an oath. Shaving of the head (*makhlūq*, *miqrāḍ*) and giving a *khirqa* usually accompanied the *bayʿa* ritual in Medieval India. The details of the ritual may differ between each lineage, or master, and sufi masters carefully retain their own tradition. Among Chishti masters during the Delhi Sultanate, the formula "You made a *bayʿa* with this weak one and a master (*khwāja*) of this weak one and our masters (and Prophet Muḥammad). You make an oath (*ʿahad*) to watch out your hands and feet and eyes, and on the broad path of the *Sharīʿa*." had been used for four generations of masters from Farīd al-Dīn to Muḥammad Gīsūdarāz [Ernst and Lawrence 2002: 24–25; MkG: 38 (No. 16 to Abū al-Fatḥ); SA (D): 333]. In the formula, the former masters are called *khwāja*, indicating that they considered his lineage goes back to the masters called *khwājagān-i Chisht*, Mawdūd Chishtī and his descendants in Chisht.

For Chishtis, having a master-disciple relationship with a sufi master was synonymous with an affiliation to the chains of masters, that is, the master's lineage. Thus, expressions like

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3 For the concepts of the Bourdieusian theory, see [Maton 2014; Thompson 2014].

"give *irāda* to a lineage" or "perform *bay'a* with the lineage" are evident in Persian works of this period [FF (L): 192: FF (Ftr.): 239; FF (Ltr.): 210]. While links between the masters in the early generations were often obscure and the nature of them was largely symbolic, in generations after the advent of masters who became eponyms of sufi lineages after the 12th century, the lineages began to represent a chain of master-disciple relationships. At this stage, the concept of deputyship (*khilāfa*) contributed substantially to the consolidation of lineages named after these eponyms and the formation of lineage groups. The Chishtis *bay'a* formula displays that sufi masters in Medieval India considered themselves performing the ritual on behalf of their former masters. Among the early Chishti literatures, *Siyar al-awliyā'* focused on the deputyship as a topic consisting of a chapter for the first time. There is a similar concept of mastership (*mashīkha*), which is more often discussed in classical works. However the concept of deputyship has stronger affinity with the concept of the lineage. This enables the master to exert the authority of the former masters. Anybody could be affiliated to a sufi lineage, but only masters that had obtained the deputyship of the former masters could affiliate people to a lineage and thus extend a sufi lineage to the next generation. This framework would have facilitated the development of consciousness among affiliates in their lineage going back to a particular master on behalf of whom the later masters were working. Also, the concept of deputyship could nurture the sense of reproducing the tradition of the former masters within affiliates of the same lineage.

II. Gatherings as a Socio-cultural Space

Having gatherings (*majlis*) was an important activity of sufi masters in the Sultanate period. At gatherings, the master would talk on themes such as mystical thought or the virtues of former masters, and the audience could ask for clarification. For sufis who emphasized the power of the spoken words of the master, the gatherings were primary occasions to have face-to-face interaction with masters [FF (L): 128; FF (Ftr.): 183; FF (Ltr.): 168]. Technically, gatherings could be held wherever a master was located. In practice, however, most gatherings were held at institutions managed by the master such as *khānqāh* (hospice, lodge), *zāwiyah* (hermitage) or *jamā'at khāna* (assembly hall). Both disciples and visitors stayed at or regularly visited these institutions, listened to the master's words, engaged in companionship with the master, and learned about thoughts and appropriate behaviors by interacting with the master and other participants. These gatherings were a socio-cultural space in which the conducts and values of sufism were cultivated.

Gatherings were spaces in which there were a kind of hierarchy between participants with an emphasis on manners and ritualistic movements. From the 11th century onwards, sufis developed concepts and rules regarding appropriate manner of conducts, namely *adab*, with the master and co-disciples during training and in everyday life. So far as is known, no

separate manual on proper conducts was written by sufis in the subcontinent until the mid-14th century. As mentioned in the Introduction, Chishtis and Suhrawardis used the same texts such as *Ādāb al-murīdīn* or *'Awārif al-ma'ārif* written in Arabic by Suhrawardi masters in Baghdad. In the latter half of the 14th century, a Chishti master Muḥammad Gīsūdarāz translated *Ādāb al-murīdīn* into Persian with an addition called *Khātima*.[4] In this work, Muḥammad Gīsūdarāz explains how to behave with and in front of the master [Khātima: 56–58, 61–66, 83–88].

Particularly for affiliates with a part-time commitment, gatherings open to the public were an affordable way to participate in sufism. Whenever a gathering was held, participants usually could join or leave the gathering relatively freely, and they did not necessarily participate in every gathering. If the master had an institution and held regular gatherings there, participation in the gatherings was much easier. The compiler of *Fawā'id al-fu'ād*, Ḥasan Sijzī, was once absent from the gatherings of his master for 8 months because of his service in the army dispatched him to Deogir. After returning to Delhi, his resuming the participation in the master's gatherings did not cause any problems. During the Sultanate period, Muslims were mostly urban dwellers engaged in government service, education, or commerce, and the few Muslims who lived in rural areas were mostly landowners in villages. Especially in the capital Delhi, possible sufi affiliates were abundant, but most of them could afford only a part-time commitment to sufism. For sufi masters in Delhi, such as Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā', gatherings were the most effective way to interact with their disciples and would-be affiliates. Given the social condition of Delhi, gatherings became the most salient loci for generating the institutionalization of sufism in Medieval India.

III. Obedience, Devotion, and Emotion

A master-disciple relationship is at the core of institutionalized sufism.[5] If a person wants to enter the path of sufism and seek God, it is considered necessary to search and find a proper master. Through the master-disciple relationship, the basic values of sufism, its teachings, practices, and authorities have been shared among the broad strata of society and transmitted beyond generations. A master-disciple relationship was mutual interactions with different obligations. While the master was responsible for his disciple's spiritual progress and salvation, obedience and devotion from the disciple to the master were indispensable. At gatherings, Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā' exemplified the importance of obedience and devotion to the master through his own experience as seen in an episode recorded in *Fawā'id al-fu'ād*.

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4 For these works, see [Hussaini 1983].

5 During the Delhi Sultanate period, sufi masters discussed on various kinds of master-disciple relationships reflected to kinds of *khirqa*. For these master-disciple relationships and *khirqa*s, see [Ninomiya 2018].

One day *Shaykh al-Islām* Farīd al-Dīn brought a prayer and asked somebody to
memorize it. I (Niẓām al-Dīn) knew he wanted me to memorize it, so I came forward
and replied: "If you permit, I would like to." The master gave the prayer to me. I
said: "I will recite it once then memorize it." The master said: "Recite." While I was
reciting, the master corrected my reading of the Arabic. Although the way I had read
it also made sense, nevertheless, I followed the master and read it as he had said.
Then, I memorized the prayer and told the master: "I have finished memorizing it. I
will recite it if you permit." The master said: "Recite." I recited the prayer as he had
directed. When I left from the master's room, Mawlānā Badr al-Dīn Isḥāq said: "You
behaved well by reading the Arabic as the master read it." I replied: "If Sībawayh or
other scholars of the Arabic grammar had come and said that the way I had read the
Arabic was correct, I would still have recited it as my master directed." Mawlānā
Badr al-Dīn said: "The manner in which you follow is not easy for us to follow!" [FF
(L): 41–42; FF (Ftr.): 106; FF (Ltr.): 108; SA (D): 336]

As Lawrence pointed out, Farīd al-Dīn might have made a mistake with the Arabic
grammar [FF (Ltr.): 376 n41]. Nevertheless, Niẓām al-Dīn did not argue and followed the
master's direction, and the behavior was much prized by another notable disciple Badr
al-Dīn. In *Fawā'id al-fu'ād*, praise for such attitudes and conducts toward the master would
sometimes be expressed through interactions with the audience.

A discussion occurred on the habit of disciples putting their head on the ground
when they visit their master. Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā lamented: "I want to stop people
from doing that for me but would not, because they did it to my master." I replied as
follows: "For the person who serves, has *irāda* to, and performs an oath to the master,
these *irāda* and oaths are expressions of their love and affection for the master. If he
has such love and affection, the posture of putting his head on the ground is just a
natural behavior [FF (L): 364; FF (Ftr.): 385–386; FF (Ltr.): 321–322; SA (D): 340].

Prostrating was a popular, but not always favorably received behavior to demonstrate
obedience and devotion to a master. The behavior could be considered as the worship of
the master because in the common norms in Islam, prostrating is a way of demonstrating
respect and devotion to God. Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā' admitted he did this to his master despite
knowing the behavior was not desirable. Then, his disciple, the compiler, justified it as a way
to demonstrate the love to their master. Here, the expression of devotional love toward the
master is prioritized over a common norm of proper conduct, just as obedience to the master
is prioritized over the grammatical correctness in the former example. In another case, Niẓām

al-Dīn recalls that his co-disciple Badr al-Dīn Isḥāq responded to his master's summons although he was engaged in prayer [FF (L): 142; FF (Ftr.): 414; FF (Ltr.): 339].

These acts of expressing obedience and devotion, often at the expense of ordinary norms, mostly involve tensions, emotions, and praise. The structure was common even in an adverse example of breaking the norms of obedience: When Niẓām al-Dīn unintentionally offended Farīd al-Dīn in an old manuscript of *'Awārif al-ma'ārif* that the master had, the situation became very dramatic as Farīd al-Dīn reacted with fierce anger and it made Niẓām al-Dīn suffer from intense agony and depression. Eventually, it turned out to be a trial from the master to make Niẓām al-Dīn develop perfection, and Farīd al-Dīn honored the disciple with a robe [FF (L): 43–44; FF (Ftr.): 107–108; FF (Ltr.): 109–110]. By explaining these episodes using emotions, Niẓām al-Dīn displayed not only the high esteem of obedience and devotion to the Chishtis master, but also a master himself as the ideal disciple of his own master. Told as a personal experience, these episodes evoke stronger emotions for himself and his disciples, thus prompting the disciples to internalize his attitudes and conducts as the ideal behaviors of a sufi disciple. *Fawā'id al-fu'ād* is especially rich in these types of episodes. These episodes recorded in *Fawā'id al-fu'ād* were reproduced in other works such as *Siyar al-awliyā'* written about half a century later, and the experiences and emotions they convey would be repeatedly shared among the readers. In this manner, the norms and conduct of obedience and devotion to the masters were institutionalized among Niẓām al-Dīn's disciples and later generations of Chishtis.

Conclusion

This article discussed how the devotional attitude to a master internalized into the disciples through the exemplification by the master himself as the model of an ideal disciple, shown in the interaction during gatherings. In the course of time, this devotional attitude, based on the master-disciple relationship formalized the *bay'a* ritual emphasizing the concept of lineage, may well lead the disciples to adhere not only to the master himself but also to the lineage of the master, as in the case of Chistis during the 13th and 14th centuries. Though Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā' himself scarcely mentioned on the masters before his own master Farīd al-Dīn in *Fawā'id al-fu'ād*, the generation after Niẓām al-Dīn started to talk about the masters before him and tried to establish the authentic chain of his master-disciple relationship. The works by the next generation of Niẓām al-Dīn, *Siyar al-awliyā'* and *Khayr al-majālis*, a *malfūẓāt* of Niẓām al-Dīn's *khalīfa* Naṣīr al-Dīn, recorded a poem demonstrating a Chishti masters' lineage line descending from the Prophet Muḥammad to Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā' (*shajarah-i mashā'ikh-i ṭabaqah-i khwājagān-i Chisht*), made by a disciple of Niẓām al-Dīn Ḥujjat al-Dīn Multānī [KhM: 7–8; SA (D): 252–255, 327]. It could be said that the consolidation of Chishtis beyond the devotees of Niẓām al-Dīn, as they seem to have shared the image of their lineage,

goes back to the Chishti masters through Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā'.

If the "thinking tools" of the Bourdieusian theory of practice are applied in the consolidation of the Chishti *ṭarīqa*, the process could be analyzed as follows. When the devotional attitude to a master trying to follow the model shown by the master internalized into the affiliates, as was the case of the affiliates of Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā', it could be said that the attitude became the *habitus* of the affiliates, reproducible for generations. Then, it resulted in the consolidation of an order as a social group sharing the *habitus*, even without a distinct method or practice, which could be developed after the consolidation of the group. Therefore, in the framework of the theory of practice, *ṭarīqa*, in an aspect could be understood as the disposition (*habitus*) favoring a particular lineage and its master(s) and a group of affiliates who share the *habitus*. The devotees usually tie a special bond with the lineage by the practice based on the rules unique in the field of sufism, and would consider what(ever) they follow as the tradition inherited from a particular (set of) former master(s) lined up in a lineage. The concept of deputyship of particular master(s), a capital that masters have and makes the hierarchy between masters and disciples, significantly contributed in this process. The development of the concept of deputyship must be closely related to the development of the concept of sufi lineage and the establishment of *ṭarīqa* because the concept of deputyship was not discussed in the major works on sufism written before 12th century. While the mechanism inside the field of sufism itself would prompt the consolidation of an order attributed to a master at any point of history, *habitus* of its affiliates might work as a deciding factor in contextualizing such "tradition" into a broader historical context. It is a topic that needs further discussion.

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