
Authorial Intercessions: A Comparative Study of Amīr Hasan Sijzī and Hamīd Qalandar

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Abstract

The paper is a comparative study of authorial interventions in the Chishtī *malfūzāt* of the fourteenth century- *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād* and the *Khair al-Majālis*. It illustrates how the respective compilers of these texts, Amīr Hasan Sijzī and Hamīd Qalandar packaged the texts for their readers. The essay seeks to accomplish it by an examination of the literary strategy that the authors deployed for the purpose. It argues that there were both meeting points and departures in the renderings of two authors. Additionally it focuses on the contributions of Hamīd Qalandar in the further development of the *malfūzāt* as a literary tradition. Additionally it indicates how the *Khair al-Majālis* is unique, despite conforming to the normative standards of penning a *malfūz*. The paper reiterates that each *malfūz* requisites individual contextual analysis, to comprehend its unique journey from an oral to a textual medium and its place in the development of the literary genre.

Keywords: *Malfūzāt*. Chishtī Shaikhs. Literary Strategy. Authorial Interventions. *Jāmi'* (compiler)

Introduction

Malfūzāt as a literary genre was prevalent in the Islamic world as early as the 12th century.¹ It was however given a new stylistic form in the circle of Nizām al-Dīn Auliya, a South Asian Chishti Saint of the late 13th and early 14th century Delhi. Especially when his disciple, Amīr Hasan Sijzī (from now onwards he will be referred to as Amīr Hasan) decided to pen the words of Nizām al-Dīn in 1307. He had been in the company of the Shaikh attending his discourses on Islamic tenets and their mystical dimensions for almost a year. With the approval and encouragement from the Shaikh, he penned all that transpired in his assemblies over a period of 15 years (1507-22) in a *malfūz* - *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād*. *Malfūz* is a derivative of the Arabic word *lafz* literally connoting that which emanates from the mouth or an utterance.² Past participle of *lafz* is

¹K.A. Nizami, *On History and Historians of Medieval India* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal), 1983, p. 163) Carl Ernst, 'The Textual Formation of Oral Teachings in the Early Chishtī Order', in *The Eternal Garden: Mysticism, History and Politics at a South Asian Sūfī Centre* (Albany: State University Press of New York, 1992), pp. 63-4.

²K.A. Nizami, *On History and Historians of Medieval India*, p.163.

malfūz(singular/ *malfūzāt*-plural) meaning the spoken word.

AmīrHasanSijzī made a significant stylistic digression from the earlier *malfūzāt*. What used to be penned as flat monologues underwent a transformation in the capture of the Shaikh's moods besides bringing alive his interactions with the gatherings.³ The text was an instant hit and became the most popular literary genre of its kind. Thereafter it became a practice to pen the *malfūz* of every ChishtīShaikh down the line by their disciples. MaulanaHamīdQalandar compiled the discourses of Nasīr al-DīnMahmūd (1354-56) who succeeded Nizām al-Dīn in 1325. GesūDarāz inherited the Chishtī legacy from Nasīr al-Din in 1356. His eldest son and disciple Sayyid Akbar Muhammad Hussaini penned his *malfūz*, *Jawami'al-Kalim* in 1400.⁴

Though the Chishtītarīqa /*silsilah* had firmly established itself by the thirteenth century yet there are few contemporary accounts of the ChishtīShaikhs as late as the first half of the fourteenth century. It was largely on account of the tendency to shun writing on part of the Chishtiyyas.⁵ It was AmīrHasanSijzī who set the ball rolling and from the second decade of the 14th century texts came to be written abundantly in diverse genres. They ranged from the collection of letters (*maktubāt*), instruction manuals (*ishārāt*) and biographies (*tazkirāt*).⁶ However *malfūzāt* became the most predominant genre to pen the teachings of the Shaikhs on religion and Sufism/*tasawwuf*. They continue to be written till date. Rendered largely in Persian till the 19th century they are continue to be compiled in Urdu and other vernacular languages.⁷

Historiography and objective of the paper

Present historiography on *malfūzāt* has gone beyond a discussion of their authenticity and their utility for constructing a social history of the times. Carl Ernst brought in focus the literary composition of the *malfūzāt*, the audience and canonical functions they catered to.⁸ This shift in historiography has drawn attention to specific investigation of each *malfūz* to understand the process of their literary composition.

³See Carl Ernst, 'The Textual Formation of Oral Teachings in the Early Chishtī Order', in *The Eternal Garden: Mysticism, History and Politics at a South Asian Sūfī Centre* (Albany: State University Press of New York, 1992), pp. 62-84. See also, Sunil Kumar, 'Assertion of Authority: A Study of the Discursive Statements of Two Sultans of Delhi', in M. Alam, F.N. Delvoye, M.Gaborieau ed., *The Making of Indo-Persian Culture* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2000), pp. 52-3.

⁴Richard M. Eaton, *The Political and Religious Authority of the Shrine of Baba Farīd, in India's Islamic Traditions, 711-1750* (Delhi: Oxford University Press), 2003, pp.263-84.

⁵Bruce B. Lawrence, *Notes from a Distant Flute: The Extant Literature of Pre-Mughal Indian Sufism* (Tehran: Imperial Iranian Academy of philosophy 1978), pp. 27.

⁶Ibid., p.27-35.

⁷AminaSteinfelds, "His Master's Voice: The Genre of Malfuzat in South Asian Sufism" in *Sources of Religions*, vol. 44. No.1, 2004

⁸Carl Ernst, *The Eternal Garden*, p.64.

My essay studies the nature of authorial interventions in the *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād* and the *Khair al-Majālis*. Authorship in a *malfūz* is “dispersed” as it is a record of the interactions of the Shaikh in his gatherings.⁹ Though the font of the discourse was the Shaikh, it included inputs from his audience as well. A learned and a proximate disciple scribed the oral oral conversations/table talks of the Shaikh. Hence the compiler of the words of the Shaikh, in Persian was called a mere collator (*jāmi'*).¹⁰ The construction of a *malfūz* was thus a joint venture of the Shaikh, the *jāmi'* and the audience.

Nevertheless, the editorial hand of the compiler was manifest in the *malfūzāt* and the Shaikhs were aware of it. A pointer to this was that the *jāmi'*s did not take dictations from the Shaikh. They participated in their assemblies addressing queries to them. The privileged and the learned amongst the audience also joined the conversations. The *jāmi'*s memorized the words and all that occurred in the assemblies, which they later reproduced.¹¹ This gave them enough discretion to sift and sort out the material. The Shaikhs scrutinized the compilations and made corrections. The editorial hand of the compiler gets manifest in Amīr Hasan and Hamīd Qalandar spelling out their purpose of renditions. As *jāmi'*s they also chose the title of the texts besides mentioning some of the audience while relegating most to anonymity.

Amīr Hasan set new standards for writing a *malfūz* in the *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād* and thereafter all the *malfūzāt* penned were assessed referring to it. Later compilers strove to confirm to some of the literary standards set by him but they also enriched the genre by their own unique inputs as well.

Hamīd Qalandar compiled the *Khair al-Majālis* between the years 1554-56 in Delhi. It was proximate in periodic and spatial location to the *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād* facilitating a comparative study. A close reading of the *Khair al-Majālis* suggests that Hamīd Qalandar was at pains to convey that he conformed only partially to the literary standards laid by Amīr Hasan. Otherwise he charted a different path from him. His handy work the *Khair al-Majālis* had something unique to offer. He seemed to be aware that newness and uniqueness of a text was critical for its popularity.

The paper studies the meeting points and departures in the literary composition of the two texts. It accomplishes it by a comparative analysis of the nature of authorial mediations of Amīr Hasan Sijzī in the *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād* and that of Hamīd Qalandar in the *Khair al-Majālis*. Authorial mediation in a

⁹Pankaj Jha, 'A Table Laden with Good Things: Reading of a 14th century Sufi Text', in A. Gupta and S. Chakaravorty eds., *Movable Type Book History in India* (Ranikhet: Permanent and Black, 2008), pp. 3-25

¹⁰ For a detailed discussion of the word *jāmi'*, See K. Khan, *The Textual Formation of a Malfūz: A Historical Study of the Khair al-Majālis*, Ph.D. thesis submitted to the Department of History, University of Delhi, 2016, p.24.

¹¹ Carl Ernst, *The Eternal Garden*, p.66-7.

malfūz involves a study of the literary strategy deployed by *ajāmi* to record the “voice” of his Sufi master. A study of the literary strategy entails an analysis of authorial positioning in the text for the following reasons. It gives an insight into the nature of audience that an author is envisaging. The audience of *amalfūz* was quite different from the live gatherings in which a Shaikh spoke. The targeted audience, impacts the construction of a *malfūz* in several ways. It determines the manner in which a compiler invokes the words of a Shaikh. It affects the “prefacing” techniques of the author to contextualize his rendering and how he titles his production. These elements of literary composition were vital in the writing of a *malfūz*.

Literary Profile of AmīrHasan and HamīdQalandar

Carl Ernst has indicated that when AmīrHasan commenced collating the discourses of Nizām al-DīnAuliya, his literary credentials were well established. He was a court poet and wrote “panegyric odes” (*qasīda*) for the Delhi Sultans and had composed several erotic verses (*ghazals*).¹² Additionally, he was hailed as the Sa‘di of Hind.¹³ Ergo he began penning the *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād* from an exceptionally high literary vantage point. His long associations of fifteen years with the Shaikh gave him an opportunity to serialize the text. He wrote it in five parts and each section covered the conversations of the Shaikhs on an average period of two to three years. He released first portion of the *malfūz* soon after its completion and came to know of the enthusiastic response of its readers.¹⁴ It was probably because of the overwhelming reception of the first part that AmīrHasan chose to serialize his writing maintaining a uniform style in the rendering of the work. (The writing spanned over fifteen years).

As far as the literary profile of HamīdQalandar is concerned, *Khair al-Majālis* was his maiden venture though he claimed himself to be a poet having compiled several poetic collections.¹⁵ A few scattered couplets of his in the *Khair al-Majālis*, however do not justify his claims. His candid expression of his hesitancy acquaints the reader of his shortcomings as he writes:

I (Ḥamīd) swear, although I am weak, I have the potential and the temperament to compose and compile. Though I have thousands of fears, yet I concede that I can ride the pen in the field of prose and poetry.¹⁶

¹² Ibid., 65

¹³ AmīrKḥurd, *Siyar al-Auliya* translated into Urdu by AjazulHaqqQuddusī (Lahore: Markazi Urdu Book Depot), 1980, 482.

¹⁴ AmīrHasanSijzī, *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād*, edited by KhwajaHasanThaniNizamiDihlawi (Delhi: Urdu Academy), 1990, 69.

¹⁵ HamīdQalandar, *Khair al-Majālis*, edited by Khaliq A. Nizami (Aligarh: Department of History, Aligarh University Press), 1959, p. 289.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 6.

A reading of the *Khair al-Majālis* illustrates that he was not an engaging author. His text is repetitive and his style lengthy and labored. He probably retained the repetitions and details from the conversations of the Shaikh to maintain the oral quality of the text. The spoken mode details and repetition probably allowed the listeners to savour and visualize the narrative of the Sufi master. However for an uninitiated modern reader, the text would make a tedious and meandering read.

Despite the *Khair al-Majālis* being in a rather unprocessed form it reveals a lot more to a reader than what the *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād* does. For instance in a case where both authors record an incidence of their respective Shaikh's initiating a woman disciple, one gathers more about the initiation process from Hamīd Qalandar. The compiler of a *malfūz* strives to preserve the aural quality of the text by the usage of direct speech and first person. Besides these devices Amīr Hasan retained the auditory elements of the text by using rhythmic prose. For *malfūzāt* were not solely meant to be read privately but also aloud publicly for listeners as is clear from the observation of Amir Hasan,

It is hoped that if God wills, a sip from this meaningful 'life giving cup' (the *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād*) the wine for souls - will provide solace to one who reads it out for others, its listeners, writers and readers'.¹⁷

Listening to poetry, songs and such mystical works created a spiritual consciousness. Then the mystic path was not singularly for the literate but also for the unlettered. The requisite for *tasawwuf* is not scholarship but faith and spiritual inclination.¹⁸

Authentication of a *Malfūz*

Both Amīr Hasan and Hamīd Qalandar stress that proximity to the Shaikh was as being vital for penning of a discourse. They spent a year to acquire that prior to writing. Proximity gave an opportunity to the *jāmi'* to seek the permission of the Shaikh to write.¹⁹ It provided better accessibility to address doubts and queries to the Shaikh. On numerous occasions on arriving late in some of the assemblies, Hamīd Qalandar requested the Shaikh to repeat whatever he had missed and Nasīr al-Dīn Mahmūd obliged.²⁰ The Shaikh being aware of the endeavour of a *jāmi'*, facilitated the process by evincing a keen interest in the progress of the text. In addition when he discussed an important theme, he ensured the presence of the

¹⁷ Amīr Hasan, *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād*, p. 370.

¹⁸ K. Khan, *The Textual Formation of a Malfūz: A Historical Study of the Khair al-Majālis*, Ph.D. thesis 2016, p. 40.

¹⁹ Amīr Hasan, *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād*, pp. 49-51 and Hamīd Qalandar, *Khair al-Majālis*, pp. 11-2.

²⁰ Hamīd Qalandar, *Khair al-Majālis*, pp. 101 and 225.

compiler.²¹

The crucial aspect of aShaikh's participation in the process of textualization was that he scrutinized and corrected the *malfūz*.²² This imparted the much-needed authenticity to a *malfūz* that it was the words of the Shaikh. Such an endorsement was vital in a scenario especially when spurious *malfūzāt* were already in circulation claiming to be the words of Shaikhs.²³ Nizām al-Dīn while scrutinizing parts of the *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād*, commended Amir Hasan's writing. He filled in the portions where AmīrHasan had missed. He also praised his naming of the text. Similarly HamīdQalandar underscored how the Shaikh had gone through the *Khair al-Majālis* and made some corrections in the Arabic portion of the *malfūz*. Writing an introduction and titling the text was crucial to the reception of *malfūz* by its readers.

“Prefacing”/Introduction of the *malfūzāt*

This brings us to the manner in which the two authors introduced their literary productions to their audience. AmīrHasan departed from the conventional Islamic practice of prefacing his work with the praise of God, the Prophet and his companions. Instead he prefaced each part of the *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād* with a brief introduction. Initiating the text with the name of God, he exalted the piety of the Shaikh briefly. Thereafter he immediately tried to draw the attention of the readers to the contents of the text. He underlined the divine and beneficial quality of the words of Nizām al DīnAuliya. Then he specified the purpose of the *malfūz* that it was his wish that others should also benefit and derive comfort which he had from the words of the Shaikh.

The author further underscored the solace-providing attribute of the text as he titled it as *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād*. It is an Arabic phrase connoting, “Benefits for Distressed Hearts”. Naming of the text was the sole convention that AmīrHasan observed from the Islamic template of titling a religious text. Arabic being the language of the *Qur'ān*, it was used for naming texts to impart sacredness.²⁴ HamīdQalandar too conformed to this Islamic literary norm. He titled the *malfūz* of Nasīr al-DīnMahmūd as *Khair al-Majālis* meaning “Best of Assemblies.” Thus he was either implying that it was best that was available on the topic or they were best words of the Shaikh. Unlike AmīrHasan instead of indicating the gain that people would get from the book, he stressed on the superior quality of its contents. This was unlikely to appeal to the readers instantly.²⁵

²¹ AmīrHasan, *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād*, p.112 and HamīdQalandar, *Khair al-Majālis*, p.50.

²² AmīrHasan, *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād*, p. 51 and HamīdQalandar, p.218.

²³ K.Khan, *The Textual Formation of a Malfūz: A Historical Study of the Khair al-Majālis*, pp.23-4.

²⁴ AmīrHasan, *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād*, pp.1,69, 155, 197,369.

²⁵ HamīdQalandar, *Khair al-Majālis*, p.12.

HamīdQalandar followed the conventional Islamic template in “prefacing” the *Khair al-Majālis* to a great extent. He only made a minor digression by omitting the praise of the companions of the Prophet. Soon after eulogizing the Prophet, he commended the piety of the ShaikhNasīr al-DīnMahmūdby drawing an analogy between the functions of the two as guides of the community. He set apart his text from the *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād* by including a genealogy of theShaikhs of the Chishtītarīqa in lyrics. This was a trend borrowed from the Sufi biographical accounts (*tazkirāt*).²⁶The inclusion of the genealogy seemed to be necessitated by the challenge to Nasīr al-Mahmūd's stature as the Shaikh from Burhān al-DīnGharīb. Both were disciples of Nizām al-Dīn. HamīdQalandar attempts to establish the spiritual superiority of Nasīr al-DīnMahmūd in the initial part of the *Khair al-Majālis*.²⁷

AmīrHasanSijzī had the fortune to publish the *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād* in the life of Nizām al-Dīn. HamīdQalandar released the *Khair al-Majālis* in 1356 post the demise of ShaikhNasīr al-DīnMahmūd. He added a supplement to the hundred assemblies that he had penned as a conclusion to the text mentioning the date of the passing of the Shaikh.²⁸

Chronological Patterning

AmīrHasanSijzī adopted the diary format in the rendering of the *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād*. He dated each assembly mentioning, the day, date, month and the year. It was probably necessitated by two facts. One he was a soldier with the Delhi Sultans and recorded the discourses of the Shaikh rather intermittently in the fifteen years. His military campaigns led to his absence from Delhi and did not permit a day- to- day recounting. The other factor could be that since he serialized the publication of the *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād*, the diary format helped the readers in maintaining a continuity. HamīdQalandar digressed from the dairy format of Sijzī but he did date the *Khair al-Majālis* by mentioning the year in the second assembly.²⁹

In both the *mal'fūzāt* chapters are called assemblies or *majlis* and do not have thematic titles.³⁰ Terming the chapters thus, they numbered them to demarcate one assembly from another. The chapters could not be titled as the assemblies commenced during the day and went on till late night. In that duration the Shaikh spoke on numerous themes according to the changing nature of the audience. People continued to stream in and out of the assemblies at prayers timings.

²⁶ Ibid., pp.1-8.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 11-2.

²⁸ Ibid., pp.282-90

²⁹ Ibid., p. 12.

³⁰ For a detailed discussion on majlis, See K.Khan, P.3.

Authorial Positioning

It is a well known fact that *Khair al-Majalis* could not get the fame which *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād* received both in the literary and religious circles. It was hailed both by its contemporaries like the poet laureate Amīr Khusrau and the scholar and historian Zia al-Dīn Baranī.³¹ Later Amīr Khurd and Gesū Darāz commended the text as well as the literary skills of Amīr Hasan. Amīr Khurd who was a contemporary of Hamīd Qalandar neither mentioned him or the *Khair al-Majālis* even though Amīr Khurd wrote the biography of the Early Chishtī saints in 1360's.³²

Gesū Darāz another contemporary of Hamīd Qalandar made disparaging remarks about the spiritual credentials of Hamīd Qalandar. He cast doubt on the *Khair al-Majālis* by communicating that it was written so badly that the Nasīr al-Dīn Mahmūd did not find it worthy enough to scrutinize it.³³ The rivalry between Hamīd Qalandar and Gesū Darāz was mutual. Hamīd Qalandar mentioned in the supplement that Shaikh Nasīr al-Dīn did not pass on his spiritual legacy to Gesū Darāz.³⁴

Though the *Khair al-Majālis* seemed to have failed on the literary front yet medieval scholars have consulted in the past. In recent times, it is extensively referred to write the history of the Chishtī *tariqa* and doctrines of *tasawwuf*. It is rich in content and its explanatory style is handy for understanding the complex doctrines of *tasawwuf*.

Authorial Positioning

The way Amīr Hasan and Hamīd Qalandar positioned themselves as authors of their works reveals their literary strategy. Amīr Hasan despite being an accomplished poet down played his literary credentials and positioned himself as a mere learner and a humble spiritual aspirant in the text. By such a posturing, he targeted a larger audience. He emphasized that his book was for all who wished to learn about religion and spirituality. Additionally he underlined that the readers, listeners and writers of the *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād* would be blessed in both the worlds.³⁵ By stressing that those who write or copy the text would be blessed, he aimed at increasing the circulation of the texts. It was vital since books in those days were hand written and writing was a tedious and an expensive affair on account of the steep cost of paper.³⁶

³¹ Zia al-Din Barani, *Tarikh-i Firoz Shahi* translated into English by I.A. Zilli, (Delhi: Primus books), pp. 222.

³² Amīr Khurd, *Siyar al-Auliya*, pp. 482.

³³ Muḥammad Akbar Husainī, *Jawami' al-Kalim*, translated into Urdu by Sayyid Rahimuddin Husain Bandah Nawazi (Hyderabad: Aijaz Perlang Press, 1956).

³⁴ Hamīd Qalandar, *Khair al-Majālis*, p. 289.

³⁵ Amīr Hasan, *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād*, p. 49.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 69

On the other hand HamīdQalandar placed himself as a teacher in the text but did not back it with confidence. Instead his hesitancy as a writer is apparent in the introduction to the *Khair al-Majālis*. He wrote.

The art of writing involves teaching, instructing and conveying the meaning. ... I (Hamīd) swear, though I am weak but I have the potential and the temperament to compose and compile. Though I have thousands of fears, yet I concede that I can wield the pen in the field of prose and poetry.³⁷

In the last assembly, he described the *Khair al-Majālis* as the child of religion, meant to guide the people of the religious academy (*madrasa*) and Sufi hospice (*khanqah*).³⁸ Thus he restricted the audience of his text to theologians, scholars, jurists and learned Sufis. It is little wonder that the *Khair al-Majālis* has detailed explications of the verses of the Quran and *hadīs* along with doctrines of *tasawwuf*. Such tall claims of author were not backed by his literary capacity and literary dexterity.

In a *malfūz* the voice of a Shaikh reverberates. The manner in which the two writers recorded the voice of the Shaikh is a fundamental facet of a *malfūzāt* but analysis of the same is beyond the scope of the present paper.

Conclusion

An appraisal of the construction of the two *malfūzāt* shows the unique contributions of each of the authors to the development of the *malfūzāt* as a literary tradition. The distinct literary styles and strategies of AmīrHasan and HamīdQalandar affected the tenor of their texts differently. For a holistic understanding of *malfūzāt* as a literary genre each *malfūz* needs an in-depth analysis paying attention to the contexts in which they were penned and the literary strategy deployed in their textualization.

³⁷HamīdQalandar, *Khair al-Majālis*, pp.4-5.

³⁸Ibid., p. 279.