

TRACING A LOST TRADITION: THE SABIRIS OF KALIYAR

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SHAH NADEEM



**CENTRE FOR HISTORICAL STUDIES
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI-110067
INDIA
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**DEDICATED
TO**

**DADAJAAN
SHAH MUHAMMAD SULTAN NIAZI
(THE MESSENGER OF LOVE AND PEACE)**

Chairperson
Centre for Historical Studies
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi-110067, India




CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled “**Tracing A Lost Tradition: The Sabiris of Kaliyar**” being submitted by **Mr. Shah Nadeem** is worthy of consideration for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy**. The dissertation has not been submitted in part or full to any other university or institute for the award of any other degree or diploma.


Prof. K.K. Trivedi
(Supervisor)

Centre for Historical Studies
School of Social Sciences
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi-110067


Prof. Mridula Mukherjee
(Chairperson)

Centre for Historical Studies
School of Social Sciences
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi-110067

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INTRODUCTION

Islamic *Tasawwuf* (Sufism), an inherent dimension of Islam, strove to achieve the inner realization of divine unity by arousing intuitive and spiritual faculties. Rejecting rational argument, the Sufis plunged into contemplation and meditation. Most of the Sufi orders, however, endeavoured to remain *ba-shara*¹. The over-riding emphasis was laid on the purification of the heart through ethical regeneration which was attainable through uncompromising belief in the transcendental nature of God (Ultimate Reality) and a tireless pursuit to establish direct communion with Him.

Crystallization of Sufism into different *silsilahs* (orders) preceded its advent into the Indian sub-continent. With the establishment of Turkish rule in Hindustan² there was unprecedented migration of the learned men including 'Ulema'³ and the Sufis belonging to different orders. Among numerous orders which thrived in Hindustan, the Chishtis were able to establish their influence in the most profound manner setting a unique precedent of cultural integration and religious toleration. Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti, the fountainhead of the *silsilah*, adopted numerous indigenous Bhakti traditions and inculcated piety, humility and devotion to God.

¹ It implies that they endeavoured to confine themselves within the limits set by the *Shariat* (Islamic law).

² The term 'Hindustan' is used to denote the geographical territory of north India which first came under the Turkish rule.

The syncretic tradition, initiated by the Khwaja was further consolidated by his virtuous successors. Shaikh Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki Dehlawi, his beloved *Khalifa*, commanded great veneration among the masses and Iltutmish was deeply devoted to the him. Baba Fariduddin Ganj-i Shakar, a replica of his pir Shaikh Qutubuddin, popularized the Chishti precepts in the Punjab and earned massive popularity for his righteousness and distinguished spiritual attainments. Shaikh Nizamuddin Dehlawi was the next luminous star of the Chishti *silsilah*. Baba Farid trained him in a very rigorous environment so he could make the Chishti *silsilah* the dominant Sufi order in India. Liberal, philanthropic atmosphere of his *Khanqah*, his charismatic personality and massive popularity earned him the epithet of *Mehboob-i Ilahi*⁴.

However, at this juncture the *silsilah* was proliferating at a faster pace and the Chishtis were soon becoming the torch bearers of Islamic piety epitomizing a more liberal, hegemonic and amenable dimension of Islam in Hindustan. Among a few most beloved disciples of Baba Farid, who spread the message of devotion and uprightness, was Alauddin Ali Sabir Kaliyari. The main thrust of this research work is to ascertain the life and activities of Ali Sabir who was the founder of the *Sabiri silsilah* and delineate the evolution of the *silsilah* after his demise.

³ 'Ulema' are the theologians of *Sunni* orthodox dogma.

⁴ The term *Mehboob-I Ilahi* means 'Dear to God'.

Nonetheless, certain clarifications are in order. A contemporary of Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya, Ali Sabir established himself at a distant rural landscape of Kaliyar, now in Haridwar district of Uttranchal. Unlike the mainstream Chishti tradition there was no trace of any organised *Khanqah* activities in Kaliyar. Nor any *malfuz*⁵ literature or contemporary *tazkiras*⁶ are available to systematically reconstruct the life and experiences of the patron Sufi and historical march of his *silsilah*.

Curiously, as the popular perception would make us believe, the shrine of Ali Sabir in Kaliyar attracts maximum number of audience after Hazrat Muinuddin Chishti. The work begins with an attempt to explain the dichotomy as to how such an eminent Chishti Sufi failed to find recognition in the contemporary literary tradition. Notwithstanding its rapid spread by his worthy successors, the history of this essentially rural *silsilah* continues to be marred by inconsistency and ignorance. Endeavour is also made to trace the evolution of the *silsilah* with an eye to appreciate the intense activities of Sabir's immediate successors.

Indeed, breaking away from the lineage of the mainstream Chishti branch, Ali Sabir, initiated an alternative model of spiritualism and withdrawal from public, urban life and allure of the royal courts. From the beginning, the *Sabiris* were much less visible than their predominant Chishti

⁵ 'Malfuz' literally meaning conversation between the pir and disciples is an important genre of Sufic literature.

⁶ 'Tazkira' is a biographical sketch of an eminent Sufi by his disciples or followers.

branch. They were renowned for their intense, awe-inspiring (*jalali*)⁷ personalities. The *Sabiri* Shaikhs stuck to more rural locales, made fewer public appearances, trained fewer devotees and contributed nothing to the sufic literary traditions.

As a matter of fact, the *Sabiris* are associated with the maximum number of *karamats* (miracles). The literature at our disposal, which deals with the *Sabiris*, invariably constitutes of a complex web of miracles and legends. However, these legends, if appreciated in the relevant context provide an insight into the attitudes and visions of the *Sabiris* and to a great extent explain the unbridled faith of innumerable devotees reposed in the shrine of Sabir and his successors.

An important aspect of this work is the overwhelming reliance on the “Traditional literature” as it can be called. The “Traditional literature” can be best understood as an unbroken tradition of writing hagiographical narratives by generations of devotees on the life experiences of Ali Sabir and his successors. Indeed, the fundamental objective lies in the recollection of these narratives and to discover a lost tradition on the basis of these literary works.

Among the contemporary Sufic literature *Siyar-ul Auliya* of Mir Khurd gives explicit references to Ali Sabir and establishes his spiritual and blood association with Baba Farid. Shaikh Abdul Haq Muhaddis Dehlawi in his *Akhbar-ul Akhyar* raises some doubts regarding the historical existence of

⁷ ‘*Jalali*’ means full of wrath.

Sabir in Kaliyar. However, the controversy which was sparked off by him provided a focal point to the modern research scholars to pursue the matter with great sincerity. *Iqtibas-ul Anwar* of Shaikh Ikram Quddusi has given an elaborate account of the foundation and evolution of the *silsilah*. His great concern in giving minute details of the legends and miracles performed by the *Sabiri* Sufis with definite context has been of substantial help in coherently exploring their attitude and vision *vis-à-vis* the state and society. A slightly later work titled *Haqeeqat-i Gulzar-i Sabiri* by Shaikh Mahmood Hasan Chishti exclusively deals with Sabir and his *silsilah*. Though, the book is written with a great partisan fervour and devotion to Sabir, its comprehensive style of narration contains numerous “Oral Traditions” which are very crucial in perceiving the tradition of tracing this lost tradition.

For the reconstruction of politico-religious thought of Abdul Quddus Gangohi, the most venerated *Sabiri* after Sabir, *Lataif-i Quddusi* of his son Shaikh Ruknuddin provides a deep insight. Shaikh Abdul Quddus’ *maktubat* (epistles), which he sent to the rulers and influential people of the time not only acquaint us with the personal inclinations of the Shaikh but also help us comprehending the prevailing politico-religious dynamics. A comprehensive study of the Shaikh’s life and thought also demonstrate how after the advent of the Mughals, the *Sabiri silsilah* grappled with the newly emerging socio-political scenario.

Among the modern Urdu sources, mentioned can be made of Maulana Abul Hasan Nadwi's *Tarikh-i Dawat-o Azeemat*. The text discusses the problems related to the historicity of Sabir and gives crucial information on Sabir's esoteric experiences and miraculous feats. It also gives a sketchy biographical account of Sabir and traces his pedigree to Hazrat Ali. *Irfan-i Sabir* by Azeez Hasan provides multiple perspectives to the study of Sabir. He elaborately discusses the evolution of Sabir's personality from an intuitive boy to an accomplished Sufi. His critical assessment of all relevant sources is particularly remarkable.

Qazi Mansoor Gangohi's *Mashaikh-i Uzzam* is basically an encyclopedic work containing extensive details on the Sufis whose shrines are located in district Saharanpur. His book begins with Sabir of Kaliyar which was erstwhile a part of Saharanpur. Finally, *Dastan Aur Karamat*, probably the most widely circulated book among the *Sabiri* followers in the interiors of Western U.P., is a collection of legends and miracles performed by Sabir and his successors.

In nutshell, the source material at our disposal, does not offer the scope for a systematic and critical evaluation of the *silsilah*. Heavy reliance on legends and myths is likely to pose certain empirical inconsistencies. Almost absolute lack of any contemporary account on Sabir further complicates the task of pursuing a methodological research. Nonetheless, the legends *per se* are not completely devoid of utility for academic research and

the tradition of unbrid'ed faith of masses attached with them make them a very powerful subject matter. In this backdrop, an attempt is made to draw a logical inter-connection between these legends and the life experiences of the *Sabiris*.

However, a note of confession is in order. Despite an earnest attempt to derive a logical sequence of events from the legendry narratives, certain apprehensions continue to exist. Without any systematic methodology the interpretation of the legends remain to be far from satisfactory. An anthropological perspective with a well defined approach to methodologically deal with the legends could go a long way in giving a far more accurate analysis of the hidden meanings of these legends. The endeavour is a humble beginning and the subject matter awaits a more thorough and systematic research.

CHAPTER ONE

SHAIKH ALAUDDIN ALI SABIR KALIYARI: THE FOUNDER

Notwithstanding the spectacular spread and popularity of the *Sabiri silsilah* in northern India, especially among the country folk, the *silsilah* has not received adequate historical attention. A corpus of literature is available to systematically reconstruct the gradual evolution of this socio-spiritual movement. But these texts, shrouded by obscurity, lack historical veracity and it becomes a Herculean task to sift out historical facts from the descriptions of miracles and legends, spun around the lives and activities of *Sabiri* Sufis. Nonetheless the traditional literature on the theme is not completely devoid of some useful information and the complicated web of miracles and legends is, indeed, a potent tool in our hands to pursue our historical research on the matter from a different perspective. However much to our disappointment, no concrete endeavour has been made to write a detailed account of *sabiri* Sufis, their in mediate socio-cultural settings and their impeccable and indelible impression on the psyche of people

The *silsilah* derives its name from a veteran Chishti sufi called Alauddin Ali Ahmad Sabir Kaliyari. The historicity of this sufi has always been a subject of keen polemic among the circles of practicing Sufis of different orders. Though there is no historical documentation at our disposal

to substantiate it, the legend goes that the first sincere efforts towards tracing the origin and evolution of the *Sabiri silsilah* and especially at corroborating the historicity of Ali Sabir began in early 20th century following a bitter rivalry between the *Nizamis* and the *Sabiris*.¹ The *Nizamis* refused to acknowledge the massive influence of the *Sabiris* on the grounds of ambiguity revolving around the founder of the *silsilah* and claims regarding his distinguished spiritual attainments and his influence on the socio-cultural evolution of different sufi orders in northern India.

A Pakistani writer S.M. Ikram characterizes this *silsilah* as very vibrant, flamboyant and full of vigour and dynamism. Unlike the urban character of the *Nizami silsilah*, the *Sabiris* established their hospices in the rural interiors of northern India.² He further explains that the well entrenched position of *Nizamis* in northern India faced an irretrievable crisis with the decline of Delhi Sultanate. *Sabiris* were at the ascendant once their was migration of *Nizamis* to Gulbarga, Patan, Pandua etc. In fact, the political turbulence which followed the death of Firoz Shah and resultant exodus of *Nizamis* provided ideal opportunity to the *Sabiris* to flourish and become a dominant force in the mainstream life of northern India.³ Indeed it was sheer rural outlook of the *Sabiri silsilah* which excluded it from any

¹ After Baba Fariduddin Ganj-i Shakar the Chishti *silsilah* was divided into two sub-branches. The mystics who identified themselves with the hospice of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya came to be regarded as the *Nizamis*. Likewise the *Sabiris* were the spiritual successors of Ali Sabir Kaliyari.

² S.M. Ikram, *Rud-i Kausar*, Idara-i Safaqt-i Islamia, Lahore, 1979, pp. 72-73.

³ *ibid.*, pp. 73-74.

conspicuous effects of rapidly changing political situations in the imperial capital or other major towns.

The focal point of the studies of the *Sabiris* is the initiation of an eminent sufi, Abdul Quddus Gangohi, into the *silsilah*, who is also credited with the discovery of the lost grave of Ali Sabir in the late fifteenth century. The *silsilah* attained unprecedented popularity under his spiritual guidance and the first conscious endeavours were made to comprehend the life and activities of the founder sufi of the *silsilah* and reconstruct his spiritual lineage. Abdul Quddus's contributions to the *Sabiri silsilah* and his revivifying effects on the *silsilah* will be discussed in the subsequent chapter but suffice here to say that he infused a new vigour and vitality into the *silsilah* and established an unparalleled supremacy of *Sabiris* in the remote nook and corners of northern India. Through his profuse writings he explicated and popularized the historical perspective of *Sabiris*' spiritual and social significance in the life and activities of common folk. He wrote *tazkiras* on Sabir's social and spiritual life. *Lataif-i Quddusi* and other later texts reveal tremendous influence of *Sabiri* precepts of extreme austerity and humility on Abdul Quddus and his successors. *Lataif-i Quddusi*, written by Shaikh Ruknuddin, a son and spiritual successor of Abdul Quddus, clearly associates the latter with the *Sabiri silsilah*.⁴ The works of early *Sabiris* like Shams al-Turk Panipati which are lost to us in original form are available to us in the works of Abdul Quddus's grandson Muhammad Sadiq.

This description makes it imperative to explore the reasons for under representation of Ali Sabir in contemporary sufic literature and apprehensions regarding his historicity. There are hardly any direct references to Ali Sabir in contemporary literature. Notwithstanding the fact that the later *Sabiri* Sufis attained great heights in their spiritual life and acquire immense popularity among the masses, the personality of Ali Sabir remains to be shrouded in mystery. Therefore it is not surprising that the available literature, pertaining to Sabir is written more on the basis of “oral traditions” than on any concrete empirical basis. Any recent work on Ali Sabir is invariably a collection of miracles performed by him. Moreover, one witnesses an underlying similarity in this ‘traditional literature’ as it could be called. These texts were written with a partisan approach with the purpose to pay a heartfelt tribute to the spiritual achievements of the founder Sufi. Lack of any definite knowledge about his early life and his activities in Kaliyar gave a spurt to miracle mongering which still continues unabated. It is for these reasons that the apprehensions were always made regarding the historicity of Ali Sabir. However, these miracles and legends can not be discarded altogether. It is difficult to believe them in totality or for that matter even partly since they can not be qualified from a rational perspective but they reflect a passionate tradition of faith which continues to find place into the psyche of people committed to the shrine of Ali Sabir. This tradition forms an important part of our data base. Endeavour will be made to explore

⁴ Azeez Hasan, *Irfan-i Sabir*, Saharanpur, 1984, p. 71.

the reasons for under representations of Ali Sabir in the contemporary accounts, establish his place in the history of Chishti *silsilah* in northern India and to critically analyze multiple shades of a *silsilah* thriving in the rural setting.

With regard to the scanty references to Ali Sabir a comparative study of the *Nizami* and *Sabiri silsilahs* would be useful. The *Nizamis* flourished in the imperial capital of Delhi which attracted learned scholars from all quarters of Muslim world; hence it had a rich literary and cultural tradition of learning and writing. Moreover, despite an ideological bias against any association with the state, the *Nizamis*' invariably found themselves entrapped in court intrigues⁵ and some other veteran Sufis like Amir Khusru enjoyed state patronage. These were sufficient grounds for the *Nizamis* to figure in official chronicles. Ali Sabir resided in Kaliyar, a distant, insignificant small town which neither had any rich cosmopolitan outlook nor any connection with the imperial city.

Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya maintained a grand hospice with his disciples and audience thronging him all the time. Hence each and every activity of the Sufi was carefully recorded. Apart from numerous *tazkiras* on

⁵ In this context, mention can be made of articles by Simon Digby on connotations of authority of the Sufis' *wilayat* and their involvement in politics. In an article, Raziuddin Aquil further corroborates the contention that throughout the period of Delhi Sultanate the Chishtis were regularly engaged in the court activities and promptly reacted to changing political scenarios. Their ambivalent attitude towards the state marked by cordiality and conflict problematizes the assumption of their political neutrality.

Simon Digby, "The Sufi Shaikh as a source of authority in Medieval India" Purusartha, (1986) pp. 57-77.

Raziuddin Aquil, "Sufi Cults, Politics and Conversions: The Chishtis of the Sultanate period." Indian Historical Review, Vol. 22, No. 1, (July 1997-January 1998), pp. 190-197.

his life and activities, his conversation with his disciples have been meticulously recorded by his disciple; Mir Hasan Sijzi, who exhibited a great sense of chronology and systematically analysed his master's personality. Conversely, as the sources would suggest, oblivious to the earthly existence, Ali Sabir used to be perpetually engrossed in devotional prayers and spiritual practices. He abhorred interaction with the masses and resided in absolute seclusion. Muhammad Ghaus Mandavi Shattari in his *Gulzar-i Abrar* mentions that Sabir possessed a dignified and awe-striking personality and exercised extreme restraint in displaying his esoteric experiences and did not have a vast train of disciples and followers. Shaikh Shams al- Turk Panipati ,the only disciple of Ali Sabir, was indeed a replica of his pir. He relished seclusion and devotion to God and did not take any interest in any cultural pursuits, including writing, poetry etc⁶ In fact he would receive occasional blessings from his pir only on Thursdays. In this backdrop it is not surprising that there are scanty references to him in contemporary literature. It was after 200 years had lapsed that Hazrat Abdul Quddus Gangohi commenced a systematic study of Ali Sabir in the late fifteenth century. The given description of Ali Sabir suggests that *Sabiri silsilah* in its initial stage did not involve any well organised khanqah activities. It remained localized with virtually no outside interaction. The seclusive attitude of Ali Sabir, his reluctance to interact with the masses and enroll a large number of disciple resulted in the absence of any active

⁶ Muhammad Ghos Mandavi Shattari, *Gulzar-i Abrar*, Lahore, 1911, pp. 585-586.

khanqah activities. It consequently prevented the recording of his life and activities.

Moreover, Shiakh Ali Sabir was among the initial disciples of Baba Fariduddin Ganj-i Shakar and most of other veteran disciples of Baba Farid joined his khanqah after the departure of Ali Sabir to the *wilayat* of Kaliyar. Shaikh Nizamuddin and Shaikh Badruddin Ishaq entered the khanqah in the year 652 *Hijri*/1240 A.D While Ali Sabir left Ajodhan much before this year.⁷It precluded all possibilities of mentioning of Ali Sabir in subsequent malfuz literature. Nonetheless his failing to find recognition in these texts does not belittle his stature among towering Chishtis, the reason for it will be explored below.

Let us at the outset deal with the apprehensions regarding the historicity of Shaikh Ali Sabir. In this regard mention can be made of *Siyar-ul Auliya*, one of the most widely acclaimed Chishti text written by Khwaja Mir Khurd, a disciple of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya. He says,

“I heard from my father that there existed a *derwesh* who excelled in piety and righteousness and was called Sabir. He had attained great heights in tasawwuf and dwelt in the township of ‘Dekri’. He was a disciple of Baba Farid and was related to his pir by blood. On Sabir’s query about his future the pir prophesied “O Sabir you will have unique experiences in life”.⁸

⁷Azeez Hasan, *Irfan-i Sabir*, p. 58.

⁸Mir Khurd, *Siyar-ul Auliya*, urdu translation by Abdul Latif, Delhi, 1994, p. 196-197.

The reference testifies beyond doubt that the sufi called Sabir who stayed in town Dekri was a disciple of Baba Farid. Shaikh Abdul Haq Muhaddis Dehalwi in his *Akhbar-ul Akhyar* accepts the presence of Ali Sabir in the hospice of Baba Farid and unambiguously maintains that he was a senior disciple and a nephew of Baba Farid. But he rejects the view that the Sabir who is referred in *Siyar-ul-Auliya* is Alauddin Ali Sabir of Kaliyar.⁹ However Aziz Hasan in his *Irfan-i Sabir* explains that since Abdul Haq Muhaddis Dehlawi knew about Sabir's activities in Kaliyar and not in Dekri, he raised such doubts. The historical documentation of the township of Dekri in Mir Sharfuddin Yazdi's *Zafarnama* will help us in locating the present day Kaliyar in the contemporary Dekri and hence refuting Shaikh Abdul Haq's doubts regarding the historical existence of Ali Sabir in the foothills of Shivalik. While describing the march of Timur's army in Haridwar; Yazdi says;

“The victorious force marched and joined the royal camp at the village of Bahrah, a dependency of Dekri, well known as the country of Mayapur. On the 12th he marched four *kos* from Bahrah and encamped at the village of Sarsawa. In consequence of immense booty which the army had gained, it was impossible to march more than four *kos* per day. On the 13th he marched and encamped at Komdar, a distance of nearly four *kos*.”¹⁰

⁹ *Irfan-i Sabir*, pp. 36-37.

¹⁰ Mir Sharfuddin Yazdi, *Zafarnama* English translation by Elliot and Dowson in *History of India as told by Its own Historians*, vol-3, pp. 513-514.

This description substantiates the contention that the present day Kaliyar which exists in the foothills of Shivaliks in District Haridwar was once a part of Dekri, better known as Mayapur. It is also noteworthy that the places described above still exist in present Haridwar and in a neighbouring town called Saharanpur

There is another confusion related to the identification of Ali Sabir. The critics argue that *Siyar-ul-Auliya* does not contain the name Ali and this does not sufficiently prove that the Sabir who is mentioned in the book is Ali Sabir Kaliyari. In this context *M'arij- ul Auliya* of Hazrat Muinuddin Nizami gives useful information. The author says;

“You must know that the Sabir who is referred to in *Siyar-ul Auliya* is indeed Shaikh Alauddin Ali Sabir Kaliyari who was a beloved disciple and nephew of Baba Farid. Sabir set an exalted tradition of ‘*sabr*’(patience),humility and selfless devotion to God and inspired many subsequent generations to imbibe the precepts of the *Chishtis*”¹¹

Even before the attempts of Hazrat Abdul Quddus we find sketchy references of Hazrat Ali Sabir in the contemporary literature but unfortunately either they were destroyed due to lack of preservation or could not attain popularity in the circles of major Sufi orders. In this regard mention can be made of Ali Sabir’s spiritual grandson Shaikh Kabir-ul-Auliya whose *Zad-ul Abrar* contains explicit references to Ali Sabir’s associations with Baba Farid, his early mystical experiences at Baba Farid’s

Khanqah, his consequent arrival at Kaliyar and different phases of his spiritual and social life. The manuscript of this book is lost to us but it is quoted by other Chishti saints.¹²

Another successor of Ali Sabir Abdul Haq Rudaulwi in his memoirs called *Bayaz-i Shaikh- ul Alimin* refers to the vigorous activities at *Sabiri khanqah* at Kaliyar. He also describes the active involvement of Ali Sabir in the socio-cultural life of the region. This book also perished but fortunately survives in the works of Abdul Quddus.¹³ However, in the light of legends attributed to him, it is difficult to believe that he ever took keen interest in the socio-political issues of the time. It is equally problematic to conceive of any vigorous *khanqah* activities in the early phase of *sabiri silsilah*. What seems more plausible is that the enthusiastic successors of Ali Sabir tried to project a more acceptable image of the founder Sufi to legitimize their massive social influence and popularity.

The references to Ali Sabir are equally ubiquitous in modern Urdu sources. Syed Abul Hasan Nadwi in his *Tarikh-i-Dawat o-Azeemat* mentions five prominent Khalifas (successors) of Baba Farid. Among them Ali Sabir Kaliyari figures along with Badruddin Ishaq and Nizamuddin Auliya.¹⁴ He argues that the essence of Baba Farid's spiritual life and his distinguished stature among his contemporaries is unquestionable. His

¹¹ Muinuddin Nizami, *Ma'arij- ul Aulia*, Moradabad, 1978, pp. 17-18.

¹² Azeez Hasan, *Irfan-i-Sabir*, p.82.

¹³ *ibid.*, p.82.

¹⁴ Syed Abul Hasan Ali Nadawi, *Tarikh-i-Dawat- o Azeemat*, Lucknow, 1978, vol-3, p. 46.

inclinations, integrity, humility and selfless devotion to God were more than manifest in the virtuous upbringing of Hazrat Nizamuddin and Shaikh Ali Sabir¹⁵ Syed Nadawi also acknowledge the fact that Sabir has not received due place in the writings on Indian mysticism. He argues that this is not the first historical mistake and history has repeatedly overlooked such eminent personalities. Nonetheless, the way *Sabiri silsilah* has attained supreme position and reached deep nook and corner of U.P is ample testimony to the fact that the founder of the *silsilah* was a distinguished Sufi.¹⁶

BIOGRAPHY OF THE SUFI

Sabir's real name was Ali Ahmad. The legend goes that when Sabir was in his mother's womb, she was given the good news of Sabir's prospective birth in her dream by no other than great 'Ali'; the fourth righteous Caliph and fountainhead of Islamic mysticism (*tasawwuf*). Ali instructed her to name her son after him. On second night Sabir's mother witnessed *sarwar-i kainat*; the prophet Hazrat Mohammad in her dream who asked her to name her son 'Ahmad' after him. Hence the boy was named 'Ali Ahmad' after his birth¹⁷. The sufi attained the title (*laqab*) of Sabir owing to his exemplary perseverance, integrity and his upright character. The word Sabir has been derived from the term '*sabr*' literally meaning 'patience'. the title was bestowed upon him by his revered *pir* Baba Farid.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 42.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 47.

¹⁷ Aziz Hasan, *Irfan-i Sabir*, p. 100.

Ali Sabir was born in Herat, Afghanistan in year 591/1213 Hijri/A.D. Some traditions ascribe his birth to the year 1205 A.D. However, he was 6 years of age when his father died in 1207 A.D. It lends credence to the earlier proposition of his birth in year 1201 A.D.¹⁸ It has been suggested that Sabir was a keen observer in his childhood and refrained from interacting with other than his household members and maintained a dignified silence most of the time. His first encounter with his inner self occurred at the age of four when during his morning prayers (*fajr*) he got spiritually turned at the recital of a particular verse “*La Maujood Illallah*”, meaning “God is everywhere”¹⁹. It marked the beginning of unfurling of Sabir’s spiritual self.

Sabir had a very speculative bent of mind. He remained in seclusion most of the time, slept a little and used to be perpetually engrossed in ‘*Zikr*’ and divine thoughts. He learnt the holy *Qur’an* at the age of 7 and spent most of his time in prayers and devotion to God.²⁰ The first turning point in Sabir’s life came with the death of his father due to severe stomach pain. Sabir remained in absolute seclusion for the next one year and hardly interacted with anybody²¹. Indeed this was the time when Sabir started exhibiting his *Qalandiri*(ascetic) and miraculous tendencies. There is an

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 103.

¹⁹ Shah Mahmood Hasan Quddusi Chishti, *Haqeeqat-i Gulzar-i Sabiri*, p. 142.

²⁰ Azeez Hasan, *Irfan-i Sabir*, p. 108.

²¹ Shah Mahmood Hasan Quddusi Chishti, *Haqeeqat-i Gulzar-i Sabiri*, p. 146.

interesting legend regarding his childhood days of extreme penury and starvation.

Once under desperate hunger Sabir asked for some food from her mother. Since there was no food his mother put some water on fire and asked him to wait for the rice to get ready. A lot of time lapsed and in exasperation Sabir again demanded for food. His mother opened the pot and smelt fragrance of boiled rice. She was pleasantly surprised. She stretched her hands and paid her heartfelt gratitude to God²²

Sabir was a *Saiyed* and traced his genealogy to the eminent personalities of Islam. From his father's side he could boast of being the direct descendent of Hazrat Abdul Quddus Jilani who in turn was a great grandson of 'Ali the Great', the fourth righteous Caliph and son-in-law of the prophet.

PATERNAL GENEALOGY

Hazrat Ali

Imam Hasan

Hasan Musanna

Abdullah Mahaz

Musa Juan

Abdullah Sani

Musa

Daud

Mohammed

Yahya Zahid

Abdullah Jaili

Abu Saleh

Hazrat Abdul Qadir Jilani

Abdul wahhab

Abdur Rahim

Hazrat Ali Ahmad Sabir

Sabir's father, Abdur Rahim, is buried in Jaliyya, Afghanistan while the shrine of his grandfather, Abdul Wahhab is in Baghdad. Baba Farid's sister and Sabir's mother Jameela Khatoon was a descendent of Umar bin Khattab, the second righteous Caliph and one of the closest associates of the prophet.

MATERNAL GENEALOGY

Hazrat Umar bin Khattab

Abdullah

Nasiruddin

Ibrahim

Ishaaq

Abul Fath

Abdullah Abrar

Abdullah Asghar

Diss
297.4
N123 Tr
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²² Ibid., p.150. Also see *Irfan-i-Sabir*, pp. 108-109.

TH-11519

Masud
Sulaiman
Mahmood
Ahmad
Shihabuddin
Mohammed
Yousuf
Shohaib
Jamaluddin

Bibi Jameela (mother of Ali Sabir)²³

There is an interesting anecdote regarding Ali Sabir attaining the title of Sabir. It is recorded in a lot of Sufic works that once Baba Farid asked Sabir “Do you take anything of which you distribute among the needy?” Sabir replied. “ I could never muster enough courage to do so without my pir’s permission.” Baba Farid was overwhelmed by this statement and conferred the title of “Sabir” on him. The ‘Sabir’ is the one who possesses the virtues of patience (*sabr*) and integrity of character.

Realizing the spiritual inclinations of Sabir his mother took him to her brother, Baba Farid, who was a distinguished Chishti saint and maintained a hospice in Ajodhan, Punjab now in Pakistan. Sabir was one of

²³ *Irfan-i Sabir*, pp. 100-110 .

the initial disciples of Baba Farid²⁴ *Iqtibas-ul Anwar* describes Sabir to be the first, closest and foremost disciples of Baba Farid.²⁵ Sabir served Baba Farid with selfless devotion and utmost reverence. Under the intensive guidance of Baba Farid he mastered *ilm-i zahiri* (exoteric knowledge) of Islamic theology, jurisprudence, the holy *Quran* and *hadis*. And finally, after rigorous spiritual training of many years Sabir was initiated into *Chishti silsilah* by his spiritual mentor Baba Farid. Impressed by Sabir's ascetic life style and his spiritual attainments Baba Farid once exclaimed to his disciples that my esoteric and external knowledge is transmitted to Nizamuddin whereas that of my *pir* (Hazrat Qutubuddin Bakhtyar Kaki) is inherited by Sabir.²⁶

Sabir was given the responsibility to supervise the management of *langar* (public kitchen). On 26 *shawwal* 603 Hijri/1225A.D, Sabir came out of the mosque after offering his afternoon prayers and distributed *langar* for the first time and again retired to his *hujra* (a small personal room for a Sufi).²⁷ He subsequently performed this service for 12 years. The only time Sabir interacted with his Khanqah mates was during his service at *langar*. Most of the time he confined himself into his *hujra* and engrossed himself in his eternal quest for esoteric experiences and witnessing the "Ultimate Reality" (*Ashghal-i batini*). It is quite unlikely that Sabir became a popular

²⁴ Abdul Hayy, *Nuzhat-ul Khwatir*, Lahore, 1965, p. 191.

²⁵ Shikh Muhammad Akram Quddusi, *Iqtibas- ul Anwar*, urdu translation by Ilhaj Khudabaksh Siyal Sabiri, p. 497.

²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 498.

²⁷ *Haqeeqat-i Gulzar-i Sabiri*, p. 158.

disciple of Baba Farid's *khanqah*. As he interacted very little with his *khanqah* companions and even his *pir*, it is probable that he could not have found recognition in the *malfuz* literature and other *tazkiras*. His indifference to other *khanqah* activities might have marginalized him from the mainstream life of the *khanqah*. But several "oral traditions" as well as written works attest a close and sentimental relationship of Sabir with Baba Farid as his disciple and a nephew

As per the wish of his sister, Baba Farid got his daughter Shareefa Banu married to Sabir. The legend goes that she succumbed to the awe-striking state of Sabir when he was overpowered by his spiritual bliss. His wife, in a legendary description, was reduced to ashes when she saw Sabir in the state of spiritual ecstasy. However, the tradition seems to be an attempt to characterize Sabir with the attributes of a perfect human who had annihilated all of his senses. Indeed other traditions give elaborate accounts of Shareefa Begum who is described as a replica of Bibi Rabia Basri²⁸ in her exposition and piety.²⁹ It seems that in keeping with Chishti tradition Sabir got married to Baba Farid's daughter but due to his extremely ascetic disposition he could not lead a normal married life. The marriage did not survive for long as we do not hear of his progeny in the contemporary accounts or in the legends ascribed to him.

²⁸ She belonged to the classic age of Islam and is considered to be the first great woman sufi of Arabia.

²⁹ *Irfan-i Sabir*, pp. 111-112.

A big turmoil in Sabir's life came with the death of his mother in *Muharram* 614Hijri/1236 A.D. It was an irreparable loss to him and it further distanced him from the worldly affairs. He completely took to separate existence and completely immersed himself in *Zikr* and prayers to God. A statement of Baba Farid recorded in *Haqeeqat-i Gulzar-i Sabiri* suggests that after the demise of his mother Ali Sabir remained in his *hujra* for nine years. Baba Farid says " On 23 *muharram* 623Hijri /1245 A.D I entered into Sabir's *hujra* and found him in the state of spiritual bliss. I recited *Kalimah* in his left ear and brought him back to the normal state of mind."³⁰The description seems to be exaggerated since survival in a small room for nine years without any outside interaction is improbable. But Sabir must have engrossed himself in the thought of God much more intensely and further curtailed his association with the *khanqah*. It helps us in reconstructing the inclinations and demeanour of the sufi under consideration. Apparently on that very day after late afternoon prayers (*asr*) Ali Sabir took formal allegiance at the hand of Baba Farid in front of other disciples and entered into the Chishti *Silsilah*. Sabir stayed in the *khanqah* for some more time before he left for the *wilayat*³¹ of Kaliyar

At this juncture certain clarifications are in order. In the popular imagination of the followers Sabir is perceived as a perfect saint who was

³⁰ *Haqeeqat-i Gulzar-i Sabiri*, pp. 168-169.

³¹ In the world of Islamic mysticism there is a concept of spiritual territorial supervision by different Sufis. In the assigned territory, the particular Sufi is expected to spread the teachings of his *pir* and *silsilah* and to undertake oath of selfless service to mankind.

Ala -ul Haque (upholder of truth), a *darwesh* whose uttered words became the truth itself and *jalali* whose anger brought devastation to the accursed. Tradition says that Baba Farid gave Sabir the discretion to go the *Wilayat* of his own choice and Sabir showed willingness to go to Delhi. Baba Farid wrote a *khilafatnama* (letter of investiture) to him and asked him to get it confirmed by one of his other senior disciples, Shaikh Jamaluddin Hasnavi.³² The legend goes that Shaikh Jamaluddin, who was aware of Sabir's asocial nature had an argument with Sabir and tore apart the *khilafatnama* in the heat of the moment. Sabir got infuriated and cursed him by saying "you have torn my *khilafatnama*, I tear your *silsilah*". And it is said that Shaikh Jamaluddin could not proliferate his *silsilah*. His son became mentally retarded and his grandson later joined the khanqah of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya.³³

When Sabir returned to Ajodhan and narrated the story to Baba Farid he said 'I can not sew what Jamal has torn' but I will write a better *Khilafatnama* for you and hence he was given the *wilayat* of Kaliyar. What appears from the aforesaid description is that perhaps Baba Farid also realised the unsuitability of Sabir for a place like Delhi. Sabir with his *Qalandari Jalal* (wrath of an accomplished saint) and his tendencies for solitude could not have adjusted himself in the capital city which was

³² As per the tradition Baba Farid had assigned the task of formal implementation of *khilafatnama* to Shaikh Jamaluddin. It was customary and all Khalifas of Baba Farid had to take prior confirmation from him

³³ *Iktibas -ul Anwar*, p. 499. and also in *Siyar -ul Auliya*, p. 190.

characterized by political intrigues, wars and other human miseries. And Sabir's encounter with Shaikh Jamaluddin must have reinforced his suspicion.

The reconstruction of Sabir's life and activities in his wilayat' Kaliyar poses numerous problems. As mentioned earlier no *malfuz* literature or *tazkiras* are available to systematically comprehend his daily experiences, his interaction with his followers and the masses. Sufic traditions believe that every accomplished wali is a replica of a prophet in terms of his attitude, outlook and temperament. In this backdrop Sabir is believed to have resembled Hazrat Musa.³⁴ In the popular imagination as well as among the practicing Sufis he has earned the distinction of a *jalali darwesh* (awe-inspiring saint) and is credited with performance of unimaginable miracles. There are innumerable legends associated with his miraculous acts and his *jalal* (anger)³⁵. The legends are exaggerated versions of his experiences in Kaliyar and they shed immense light on his evolution as a great Chishti saint who set a paradigm of unparalleled devotion to God and inspired many successors to emulate him in spiritual attainments.

Sabir reached Kaliyar in 650 Hijri/1256 A.D and attracted masses with his divine and awe-striking appearance. He faced stiff opposition from the ulema who disliked Sabir's ascetic outlook and his

³⁴Qazi Manzoor Gangohi, *Mashaikh- i Uzzam*, p.5. Also see Iqtibas –ul Anwar, p. 498.

³⁵ Sabir is associated with most of the miracles among *Chishtis*. *Iqtibas –ul Anwar*, p. 498.

qalandari attitude.³⁶ The ulema led by Qazi Tabarrak started challenging Sabir's claim of wilayathood of Kaliyar. They started creating troubles for Sabir and his followers and humiliated them on various occasions³⁷ A very popular legend demonstrates the bitter opposition Sabir had to encounter at his arrival to Kaliyar.

One Thursday when Sabir was delivering his sermon at the mosque, Qazi Tabarrak challenged him "If you can tell me about my goat I lost three months back, I will acknowledge you the *wali* of Kaliyar." Sabir clearly understood that his authenticity was challenged. So he raised his hand in the sky and said "Those who have eaten the goat, come here" As soon as he said this 27 men came forward. When asked if they had eaten the goat, they denied it. On repeated denials, Sabir asked Qazi Tabarrak to call out the lamb's name. Qazi shouted "Harmana Harmana ! Where are you?" Hearing this she screamed from the stomachs of those men who had eaten her and described how she was cut into the pieces. This miracle brought rapid popularity to him but Qazi Tabarrak called Sabir a magician and started conspiring against him.³⁸ It is difficult to believe in the authenticity of these miracle from a rational standpoint. However, it should be borne in mind that it is the faith of Sabir's followers in his miraculous powers that his shrine emerged as a powerful regional cult. The miracles attributed to him might be

³⁶ *Iqtibas -ul Anwar*, p. 502.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 503.

³⁸ Qazi Mansoor Ahmad Gangohi, *Mashaikh-i-Uzzam*, p. 12.

purely concocted, but they are deeply embedded in the imagination of his followers.

Apparently, Sabir was gaining rapid popularity by performing miracles which silenced his critics. They indulged in slander and propaganda against his claim as the wali among the people, and denounced him as the enemy of Islam. Opposition reached intolerable proportions and Sabir's attendants complained against repeated intimidation at the hands of the *ulema*. Sabir asked them to be patient and corresponded with his *pir* informing him about the situation. Baba Farid wrote a letter to the people of Kaliyar to accept Sabir as the wali but opposition from the *ulema* continued unabated.³⁹ Sabir remained patient but his followers showed their inability to face *ulema's* hostility and asked Sabir to do something about the matter. Sabir again wrote to his *pir* who finally replied

"This wilayat is your goat. Milk it or slaughter it"⁴⁰

The statement is recorded in almost every source pertaining to Sabir and raises a lot of apprehensions. Given the exemplary tolerant attitude and humility of Baba Farid it is quite unlikely of him to give Sabir the permission to destroy Kaliyar (implicit in his statement). However, chroniclers give justification of subsequent destruction of Kaliyar by Sabir on these grounds.

³⁹ *Irfan-i Sabir*, pp. 119-120.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. 120.

Once during the Friday prayers Sabir, with his followers, was sitting near the *mimbar* (pulpit). When the time of prayer approached one of the ulema asked Sabir to leave the place. Sabir's followers replied that they came first and Islam does not allow discrimination on the choice of place to worship. The alim replied that he had inherited the place from his ancestors and hence claimed the place as a matter of right. In this ensuing altercation Sabir raised his head from his meditative state and exhorted the ulema by saying that a wali deserves this place more than *ulema-i zahir*. The ulema and their followers started humiliating Sabir and raised a cry asking Sabir to prove his *wilayat* then and there. Sabir replied in his utmost exasperation "The proof of my wilayathood will cost you your lives". He was almost dragged out of the mosque with his followers. It is a legendary description that *jalal-i Sabir* reached intolerable limits. Sabir raised his hands and demolition of the mosque followed and all opponents perished. A lot of hue and cry followed and survivors and other people visited him seeking pardon. Sabir replied "Desertion of this place is better for me" and asked them to leave since destruction of Kaliyar was inevitable.⁴¹ This incident apparently happened in the early years of Sabir's stay in Kaliyar. That there was dogged resistance to Sabir from the *ulema* is beyond doubt. In all likelihood Sabir would have had to leave Kaliyar due to violent opposition and vehement antagonism of the ulema. And it must have taken him some more years of spiritual meditation and isolated existence in an adjacent jungle to attain the

⁴¹ *Irfan-i Sabir*, pp. 120-121.

position of a distinguished sufi .But interestingly, a different Chishti as he was, it was his ascetic and *qalandari* outlook and not the hospitality of his khanqah which attracted the masses towards him.

This particular event apparently marked a decisive shift in the life and activities of Sabir. His miracles earned him the reputation of an accomplished saint, his popularity increased immensely and people started thronging him. However, he took to isolation, completely immersed himself in divine thoughts and started abhorring the masses and worldly affairs. Sabir migrated 4 *kos* away from there in a forest and completely devoted himself to his spiritual practices and prayers. Only on Thursdays he would reluctantly allow audience to come to his khanqah but he would lament on every Thursday “Dogs of the forest leave today because dogs of the world will come today.”

There are some interesting anecdotes pertaining to Sabir during his self-imposed exile in the forest. Once the *qawwal* (traditional professional performers of musical recital) of Baba Farid reached his *Khanqah* to meet him. Sabir offered him salted *goolars* ⁴²and enquired about his beloved *pir*. The *qawwal* spelt his *pri*'s well-being and tried to ask about Sabir's life. Sabir replied “Convey my regards to my *pir*”. The doomsday (*Qayamat*) is fast approaching so go as both of us do not have any time”. Afterwards Sabir went back to his *hujra* quietly.⁴³ *Irfan-i-Sabir* records

⁴² *Goolar* is a wild fruit.

⁴³ *ibid.*, pp. 138-139.

Hazrat Amir Khusru's visit to Kaliyar. Apparently Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya asked him to behave properly with Sabir and not to waste much of his time and not to do anything which could offend him. Amir Khusru visited Kaliyar and was served salted *goolars* in the characteristic way of the *Khanqah*.⁴⁴ It is said that Sabir used to take boiled *goolars* and it was only during the visit of the guests associated with his *pir* that the *goolars* used to be served with salt and pepper. In yet another instance a disciple of Nizamuddin asked his *pir* to offer *fateha* (spiritual chanting of certain Quranic verse in the name of the prophet through the intercession of ancestors) on the food he had brought. Shaikh Nizamuddin asked his disciple to wait since Baba Farid was engaged in receiving *fateha* from Shaikh Sabir.

Certain inferences can be drawn from the given references. There is no mention of Sabir in any of the *Nizami* texts. The *malfuzaat* of Hazrat Nizamuddin quote many sayings and traditions of all veteran Chishtis including Hazrat Muinuddin Chishti and Baba Farid. But there is not even a single reference to Sabir. Similarly, there is no documentation of Amir Khusru's visit to Kaliyar in any of the *Nizami* texts. There seems to be a tendency among the biographers of Sabir to prove his association with the Chishti *khanqah* at Delhi and legitimize the historical superiority of *Sabiris* as the aforementioned references have suggested.

Sabir is believed to have completely annihilated his senses in the pursuit of his spiritual goals. He is believed to have been taken by spiritual

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p. 139.

ecstasy while holding a branch of “*goolar*” tree. He remained in the state of spiritual bliss for 12 years, coming out only to offer his prayers and survived on *goolars*. The tree still stands erect and is revered by the followers even today. The story is definitely exaggerated but it shows that Sabir exhibited matchless integrity, patience and ascetic virtues in attaining a distinguished position among the contemporary Sufis and notwithstanding his *jalali* image left an indelible mark on the psyche of people. It is no exaggeration that after his death a strong *Sabiri* cult arose around his grave which still continues to attract innumerable audience.

Some interesting inferences can be drawn from the aforesaid description. It reinforces the theory of traditional rivalry between the Sufis and Ulema in the contemporary context. It is worth mentioning here that unlike the urban setting of Delhi where the mutual animosity between the Ulema and Sufis was confined to ideological plane, opposition to Sabir and his followers assumed violent forms including their intimidation and discrimination by the Ulema. This might have been equally true for the other regional and remote settlements. Some generalizations regarding Chishtis also stand untenable in the light of Sabir’s life experiences. Unlike the popular notion regarding the Chishtis, Sabir in most of his lifetime remained indifferent to the masses, did not maintain a significant hospice. Nor had he a vast number of disciples. He did not reflect on any current socio-political issue. It was not his grand hospice, his social stature or his recognition

among political circles which gave him a distinct identity. Indeed, he comes across to us as a disillusioned saint who failed to attain fame and recognition. As a *derwesh* whose awe-inspiring personality rendered him unfit to carry forward the socio-syncretic mission of Chishtis. However, quite paradoxically, Sabir who avoided interaction with the masses in his life time continues to serve the humanity in an awe-inspiring ambience of his shrine in Kaliyar

CHAPTER TWO

EXPANSION OF THE *SILSILAH*

The main focus of this chapter is to explore the trajectory of the evolution of the *Sabiri silsilah* after the demise of the patron saint Alauddin Ali Sabir Kaliyari. Within a few years of Sabir's death the *sisilah* started with fresh zeal and intensity and soon it engulfed the whole of modern U.P and parts of modern Haryana and Uttranchal. After Sabir's death Kaliyar got mysteriously deserted and we do not hear of it in the subsequent literature until the advent of Shaikh Abdul Quddus Gangohi and discovery of Sabir's grave.

Panipat was the next *Sabiri* stronghold where it thrived for many years and gave massive popularity to the *sisilah*. The main thrust of this chapter is to critically evaluate the life and activities of initial three stalwarts, who gave a concrete and a well-rooted identity to the *sisilah*. Shaikh Shams al-Turk Panipati, the only disciple of Sabir established himself in Panipat as per the wish of his *pir* and initiated organised *khanqah* activities. Apparently he was a replica of his *pir* and believed in absolute devotion to God and relished seclusion. But it is quite likely that given a great leaning of people of Panipat towards him and his distinction of being the only disciple of

Sabir he would have put forward a more popular outlook of the *silsilah*. The sources, which deal with the life and activities of Sabir, also throw immense light on the evolution of Shams-ul Turk as a great Sabiri who successfully carried forward the spiritual legacy of Sabir.

SHAIKH SHAMS -UL TURK PANIPATI

Not much is known about the birth and early life of Shaikh Shams for all contemporary chronicles are silent on his date of birth and his childhood. However, he was an Alwi Saiyyed and traced his pedigree to Ali, the fourth righteous Caliph of classical Islam.¹ He married in Turkistan and bore a son named Saiyyed Ahmad. It has been suggested that it was through the progeny of Shaikh Shams' son that the Saiyyeds retained their identity in Turkistan.² All the Saiyyed families of Turkistan are believed to have been an offshoot of Shaikh Shams' family.

Shaikh Shams-ul Turk was a disciple of Baba Farid and joined his *pir* at his khanqah in Ajodhan. Shaikh Shams had heard a lot about tales of Sabir's patient attitude and his spiritual inclinations. He apparently visited him in Kaliyar once and was completely overwhelmed and overawed by Sabir's personality. But he could neither come close to Sabir nor acquire his discipleship. He went back to Ajodhan.³ There is a famous anecdote regarding the first intense conversation between Sabir and

¹ Shaikh Muhammad Akram Quddusi, *Iqtibas -ul Anwar*, urdu translation by Ilhaj Khudabaksh Siyal Sabiri, Lahore, 1895, p.510.

² *ibid.*, p. 526.

³ Azeez Hasan, *Irfan-i Sabir*, p. 133.

Shaikh Shams. Once Baba Farid got extremely worried and anxious when he heard that Sabir had been taken over by spiritual ecstasy and stood on empty stomach for many days by holding a branch of '*goolar tree*'. Baba Farid asked his disciples "Can somebody get my Sabir back to the normal state" Shaikh Shams said confidently "O my *pir* allow me to march towards Kaliyar to fulfill your wish. I will make your Sabir sit on the ground and engage him in a conversation with me."⁴

Baba Farid told Shaikh Shams about the *jalali* (full of wrath) nature of Sabir and asked him to reconsider. However Shaikh Shams showed his willingness to visit Sabir and finally Baba Farid granted him permission to proceed to Kaliyar and become Sabir's disciple if possible. Baba Farid however asked him to exercise extreme restraint and precaution to avoid Sabir's wrath. Shaikh Shams finally reached Kaliyar. It is difficult to ascertain the year Shaikh Shams reached Kaliyar but in all likelihood he visited Sabir in the later phase of his stay in the jungle, 4 *kos* ahead of Kaliyar because the popular legend of Sabir holding a *goolar tree* for 12 years is ascribable to a later stage.

When Shaikh Shams reached Sabir's *khanqah* he found him clinging onto a branch of *goolar tree* and deeply engrossed in divine thoughts. There was an awe-inspiring radiance on Sabir's face. Shaikh Shams waited upon him hoping that the spell of his spiritual ecstasy would end. Apparently, as the sources would make us believe, days and

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 134.

nights passed, Shaikh Shams waited but Sabir remained overtaken. Shaikh Shams could not muster enough courage to invite Sabir's wrath by disturbing him and remained patient. But finally, when he consciously realised his mission in Kaliyar, he raised his hands and requested God to help him in his endeavour.

One day at the break of the dawn Shaikh Shams started reciting *Sur-i Rahman*⁵ Shaikh Shams continued in his melodious voice until the expressions on Sabir's face eased and the radiant wrath disappeared. Shaikh Shams immediately stopped reciting the verse. Sabir opened his eyes, the wind stopped blowing, the leaves stopped moving when Sabir cried and said "O *derwesh* go on. Why are you depriving me from listening to the words of God?" "O my lord I do not have enough energy to stand and recite the verse" replied Shaikh Shams. Sabir then asked him to sit and recite but Shaikh Shams replied "O my lord I can not dare to sit when you are still standing". Sabir sat down and asked Shaikh Shams to resume reciting of *Sur-i Rahman*. Sabir was ecstatic and rejoicing. And an unusual smile emerged on his face. Sabir was completely spellbound by Shaikh Shams' melodious and enchanting way of reciting. Shaikh Shams then again took a halt lamenting that he had exhausted his energy to even to sit and recite. Sabir said "Lie down but do not stop". Shaikh Shams again showed his inability to lie down when Sabir was still sitting. Sabir

⁵ *Sur-i Rahman* is a *Qurunic* verse known for its lyrical beauty.

finally lied down and so did Shaikh Shams. The recital continued and Sabir was brought back to the normal state of mind.⁶

Shaikh Shams got up and fetched some water and boiled *goolars* and offered it to Sabir. Sabir asked him “who are you my dear? I can smell the fragrance of my *pir's* *khanqah* in you”. Shaikh Shams replied, “O accomplished saint, you have sensed it right. Baba Farid has sent me here to be at your service”. Unlike his usual reluctance Sabir gave Shaikh Shams his blessings and requested him to recite the *Quranic* verses once again. And Sabir again started to enter in his meditative self. Shaikh Shams was delighted and immediately reported it to Baba Farid through esoteric communication. He began to recite the *Quran* once again with a complete sense of contentment that he finally got a place in the *Khanqah* of Sabir.

With Sabir having an inaccessible personality, it was not easy for Shaikh Shams to gain intimacy with him. Traditions say that for years Shaikh Shams had to selflessly serve Sabir's *Khanqah* virtually as a domestic slave. For fifteen years Shaikh Shams undertook to entertain Sabir's guests, prepare food for Sabir and his occasional visitors and collect firewood on regular basis from the neighboring jungle.⁷ Nonetheless, Shaikh Shams felt greatly overwhelmed for he was able to interact with Sabir on various issues and would get the honour of serving

⁶ Shaikh Muhammad Akram Quddusi, *Iqtibas-ul Anwar*, urdu translation by Ilhaj Khudabaksh Sabiri, pp. 511-512. Also see Azeez Hasan, *Irfan-i Sabir*, pp. 135-136.

Sabir on a permanent basis. Though the process seemed to have been a long drawn one, with the passage of time the intimacy between the two grew steadily and Sabir began to look upon Shaikh Shams as his son. It was an anticipated fact that Shaikh Shams would take the lead of *Sabiri silsilah* after Sabir. Once Sabir in a state of joy proclaimed, “O Shams, you are my son. I have requested God that my *silsilah* will be continued through Shams and will thrive till the doomsday”.⁸

Haqeeqat- i Gulzar- i Sabiri gives elaborate account of Shaikh Shams’ selfless devotion to Sabir. Shaikh Shams exhibited patience and perseverance of his *pir* and lived in almost starving condition, while he could have afforded a better and luxuriant life.⁹ In a famous instance Sabir told Shaikh Shams, “God has one *Shams* (sun) on the sky and you are my *shams* on the earth.”¹⁰ Sabir formally conferred upon him the title of *farzand- i manam* meaning “The adopted son”.¹¹ Shaikh Shams lived under rigorous conditions at Sabir’s *Khanqah* and a long stay with an accomplished Sufi had instilled in him a great divine fervour and soon his popularity as a *Sabiri derwesh* reached far and wide.¹² He was seen as a replica of his *pir* in grace, integrity, piety and righteousness. Since he was the only and beloved disciple of Sabir, the latter decided to chose him as his *Khalifa* (spiritual successor). One day in the presence of many eminent

⁷ Azeez Hasan, *Irfan -i Sabir*, p. 134.

⁸ Shaikh Muhammad Akram Quddusi, *Iqtibas -ul Anwar*, urdu translation by Ilhaj Sabri, p. 512.

⁹ Shah Mahmood Hasan Quddusi Chishti, *Haqeeqat- iGulzar- i Sabiri*, p. 245.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 244.

¹¹ Azeez Hasan, *Irfan -i Sabir*, p. 134.

Sufis Sabir granted him his scepter and conferred upon him the *wilayat* of Panipat. On this memorable day Sabir preached to his disciple

“O Shams, you have come to this mortal world as a passenger, so live like a passenger. Never attach your soul to anything worldly for that is bound to perish. You are a *derwesh* so stick to humility, poverty and devotion to God, control your senses and desist from increasing your desires.”

In the “Oral traditions” of the *Sabiris*, a parallel has been drawn between the intense relationship of Nizamuddin Auliya and Amir Khusru on the one hand and Sabir and Shaikh Shams on the other. An instance is recorded where Shaikh Shams left Kaliyar for Ajodhan to meet Baba Farid. He reached Ajodhan and conveyed Sabir’s regards to Baba Farid with wet eyes. Baba Farid queried him for his restlessness and his watery eyes. Shaikh Shams lamented his plight for being away from Kaliyar for so long. Baba Farid asked him why had he come to Ajodhan then. Shaikh Shams then told Baba Farid that his disciple Sabir was desperate to get the news of your well-being. Baba Farid was overwhelmed by his devotion to Sabir. And after the night prayers he communicated with Sabir through divine telepathy¹³. The narrative sheds light on many pertinent aspects. The recollection of the tale of Sabir and his immediate successor is done with an attempt to legitimize their position as the Chishtis. Their attempt to make a comparison with the

¹² *ibid.*, p. 145.

¹³ Shah Mahmood Chishti, *Haqeeqat- i Gulzari –i Sabiri*, p. 272.

Nizami personalities and emphasize on sustained relationship with Baba Farid adequately suggest points to in this direction. This is not to be taken as a conclusive proof to discard them as Chishtis. Their legitimized position as Chishtis in the rural interiors of U.P is beyond any doubt. And a lot more is needed to be explored before we make any substantial generalizations regarding Sabir and his beloved successor.

Certain inferences can be drawn from the descriptions given above. Sabir, despite his aversion to enrolling large numbers of disciples, did speculate over his spiritual legacy. And not surprisingly, he called Shaikh Shams his son, trained him in the rigorous practices of *Sabiri* precepts and above all he desired perpetuation of his *silsilah* through him *till* the arrival of the doomsday. Sabir does not come across as a Sufi who, failing to establish a popular *khanqah* eschewed his desire to proliferate his *silsilah*. Even if taken with a pinch of salt, the sources dealing with Sabir and his *silsilah* associate maximum social visits and sermons of Sabir with Shaikh Shams. It amply testifies to the realization of Sabir to give a concrete form to his socio-spiritual vision. In his recorded statements he referred to Shaikh Shams as his “sun” who will illuminate the *sabiri silsilah* after him. Shaikh Shams clearly understood the wish of his *pir*. And undoubtedly he greatly widened the base of this *silsilah* and took it beyond the confines of Kaliyar.

Shaikh Shams was given the *wilayat* of Panipat in modern district of Haryana. But before he could actually go and establish his *khanqah* there he sought his *pir*'s permission to engage in some material pursuits to fulfill his obligations to his family relations and his other worldly commitments. He showed his willingness to join the royal army of Delhi. Sabir did not readily permit him and asked him to reconsider his decision, as it was difficult for a Sufi to actually associate himself with the state and simultaneously stick to his rigorous spiritual practices. Shaikh Shams decided not to join any profession for material gains but finally even Sabir asked him to accomplish his worldly duties first and hence Shaikh Shams proceeded to the capital city of Delhi. After roaming about for a week he finally got recruited in the royal army.¹⁴

There is a famous legend on the miraculous feats of Shaikh Shams in the royal army. Shaikh Shams continued his military career under Kaiqubad and Jalaluddin Khalji. As many source have mentioned, Shaikh Shams participated in a military operation of Jalaluddin Khalji against the forces of rebellious Chajju Khan in the North West frontier. Chajju Khan received support from the numerous tribes of the region and made a powerful confederacy against Jalaluddin Khalji. Chajju Khan could not withstand the might of imperial army, with the Sultan leading it

¹⁴ Muhammad Mohsin Sabri,, *Dastan aur Karamat*, Haridwar, 1984, p. 31.

in person. But he entrenched himself in a fort, beating off all the efforts of royal army to capture it.¹⁵

It was extremely cold. The army had camped outside the fort. The exasperation was increasing in the Delhi army since all their attempts to humble it down were thwarted by the rebellious forces. One night a powerful storm engulfed all the camps and created confusion by extinguishing all the lamps. Even the royal camp was without any light. A senior army officer ordered a kitchen attendant to immediately leave and arrange for some fire to light the lamps of the royal camp. The servant roamed about everywhere but could not find any camp with a burning lamp. Finally, at a great distance almost at the extreme margin of the field, he saw some light coming out of the camp. He immediately reached the camp and found that a graceful man was sitting and reciting the *Quran*. He was oblivious of the surroundings and the powerful storm had not affected anything of his camp. Everything was calm and serene and the lamp was burning smoothly. The servant was over-awed and could not garner enough courage to say anything to that saint. After a moment the saintly figure realised the presence of somebody at the gate and asked him the purpose of his visit. The servant narrated the whole story and asked for his permission to get some fire from the burning lamp. The saint told him that even he was in the service of Sultan and hence you can take it as a matter of right. The servant was overwhelmed. He lit his lamp, thanked the saint

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 32.

and rushed back to the royal camp. This saintly man was no other than Shaikh Shams al-Turk Panipati.

The servant was restless and completely unnerved. He could not sleep in the night and kept on thinking about the saint he met in the evening. Hours passed by but he could not sleep and in the early hours of the next morning he felt an irresistible urge to meet that graceful person again. Failing to control his anxiety the servant started walking towards the camp of that saint. After reaching there he hesitated initially but finally entered the camp. The saint was not there and he was surprised because it was an unusual time for anybody to be away from his camp. The servant came out and reached a pond where he saw the same saint performing ablution (*wuzuh*) for his early morning prayers. The servant was amazed to see that because it was biting cold and the water was almost frozen. However, he kept on observing him and when the saint left he went to the place where the saint was performing his ablution. He was again astonished to see that the part of the pond where that saint performed his ablution was full of warm water.

The kitchen attendant waited for the next midnight to confirm his doubt that the saint was a *wali* (an accomplished sufi). He went to the same place where the saint would perform his ablution and discovered that the water was extremely cold. Then he waited for the saint to come and do his usual ablution. After the saint had left he walked up to the pond again

and was dumbfounded to realize that the water had turned warm after saint's divine touch. The next morning the servant went to the royal court and narrated all his experiences with the saint. Many other soldiers also told the Sultan about the awe-inspiring personality of Shaikh Shams and soon the tales of Shaikh Shams spiritual capabilities spread like wild fire. The Sultan sought a personal meeting with Shaikh Shams, which the latter hesitantly agreed to. The Sultan asked Shaikh Shams to pray to God for his success in capturing the fort. Shaikh Shams replied that he was an ordinary mortal and did not possess any special powers to perform any miracles. The Sultan told Shaikh Shams about the experiences of his soldiers and specifically of that servant with him and requested him to just pray for the victory of the royal army. Shaikh Shams was in a fix and he remembered Sabir to get him out of the trouble. The Sultan was unrelenting and the entire army looked up to him expectantly. Finally Shaikh Shams yielded and promised the Sultan that he would pray to God. Next day the fort was stormed by the Delhi army and the rebels were brought down to heels. The popularity of Shaikh Shams had no limits now. Shaikh Shams recalled the words of his *pir* and cried for repentance for his esoteric self was now exposed to the world. He left the army immediately afterwards without telling anybody and proceeded towards Kaliyar.¹⁶

¹⁶ *Irfan i-Sabir*, p. 149. Also see *Haqeeqat i- Gulzar i-Sabiri*, p. 514.

This episode is narrated in almost all the texts dealing with the *Sabiri silsilah*. It reflects upon some very curious aspects of the Chishti tradition of maintaining a certain distance from the state and yet influencing it with their spiritual achievements and social stature among the masses. The altercation between Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya and Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq is too well known to be repeated here. Nasiruddin Dehalwi commanded equal respect among the masses. With Shaikh Shams the *Sabiris* entered the public arena for the first time. His popularity among the masses of Delhi and neighboring regions multiplied rapidly. It is interesting to note that the 'traditional literature' on the *Sabiris* contain such narratives where a *Sabiri* Sufi had attained a distinguished position in the eyes of the temporal authority and exercised immense popularity among the masses. Whether it is yet another endeavour to present a more exalted picture of the *Sabiris* vis-à-vis the *Nizami* Sufis is subject to further research. But it will be plausible to argue that these tales of the *Sabiri* saints have continued to influence the imagination of masses for generations. And the tradition of retelling the story of these saints has not been lost altogether.

Shaikh Shams reached Kaliyar and put his head on his *pir's* feet. Sabir raised him up and consoled him and asked him to forget about whatever happened. Shaikh Shams felt deeply remorseful and asked his *pir* for further instructions. Sabir replied "O Shams, you must take lesson

from the experience you had as a royal soldier. I believe that the grace should not be hidden anymore. Go to your *wilayat* of Panipat and serve humanity in a selfless manner. My blessings will remain with you forever. Be my Shams (sun) and the *silsilah* will flourish on the precedents you will establish in the world of *Tasawwuf*¹⁷

Shaikh Shams stayed with his *pir* for a few more months and had intense discussions with him. It is difficult to ascertain the nature of such conversations since we do not have any *malfuz* literature at our disposal. But it has been traditionally believed that Sabir gave final teachings of *Sabiri* precepts and introduced Shaikh Shams into the higher levels of mystic world. Shaikh Shams finally marched towards Panipat. It is difficult to ascertain the year of his departure from Kaliyar but he seems to have reached Panipat in the last decade of the thirteenth century.

Shaikh Shams received a very warm welcome from the people of Panipat, as his saintly qualities were widely known by now. Shaikh Shams chose a lonely and deserted place to establish his *khanqah* and his life in his *wilayat* began.¹⁸ There are numerous legends and stories, which suggest that the advent of Shaikh Shams in Panipat brought immense comfort and satisfaction to the masses. While the learned came to quench their intellectual thirst, the poor thronged his place to listen to *Sama* and eat the food distributed in the *langar*. No discrimination was made on the

¹⁷ *Irfan i-Sabir*, p. 151.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

basis of caste, race and religion. Shaikh Shams gave a new dimension to the *Sabiri silsilah*. Though he followed his *pir's* ideals in devoting maximum time in the spiritual prayers and *zikr*, but unlike Sabir he had a popular outlook and he freely associated with the learned people of all religions and attracted the poor by his generous personality.¹⁹

However, it is quite doubtful whether Shaikh Shams' *khanqah* had any parallels with the *khanqah* of *Chishti Nizami* *khanqah*. Panipat still lacked the sophistication and grandeur of Delhi. It is not futile to assume that the outlook of the entire *khanqah* settlement in Panipat might have been very rural. No contemporary written works belonging to the *khanqah* has come down to us. But, paradoxically, it is equally surprising to note that there is no dearth of popular legends and tales of the *Sabiri khanqah* of Panipat. As a matter of fact, with limited academic capabilities, a generation of devoted followers have contributed substantially to shaping the belief system of the masses in the shrines of these Chishti Sufis of northern India.

Sabir was fond of listening to *sama* (musical recital) and it was Shaikh Shams' powerful voice, which had attracted him. But in Kaliyar he never participated in big *sama* gatherings. Shaikh Shams popularized the practice of *sama*. In numerous references he has been shown as a great lover of spiritual musical gatherings. Shaikh Shams would spend hours in listening to *sama* and get so intensely invoked that his soul would get

¹⁹ *Haqeeqat-i Gulzar-i Sabiri*, p. 517.

engrossed in divine thoughts and he will become oblivious of everything around.²⁰ There is this famous incident which defines a unique dimension of the relationship between the *pir* and his *Khalifa*. Shaikh Shams used to have big *sama* gatherings on regular basis. On one such occasion Sabir arrived at Panipat without giving any prior information to Shaikh Shams or an other *khanqah* mate. Shaikh Shams was overtaken by spiritual ecstasy and was impervious to Sabir's presence. The *sama* continued for the whole night and Sabir waited for Shams to come back in the normal state. When the dawn was about to come up, Sabir got up to go back. Suddenly, Shaikh Shams regained his consciousness and realized that he had made his *pir* sit the whole night waiting for him. His head was on Sabir's feet in the next moment. He cried and sought apology for such an atrocious act. Sabir remained silent for some time and then raised his head from the ground, consoled him and ask him not to repent as it was an act of ignorance and not done deliberately.²¹ Sabir stayed in Panipat with his disciple for two more days and then subsequently went to pay a visit to Hazrat Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki's shrine in Delhi. Shaikh Shams was still unnerved and could not get over the fact that he had indirectly insulted his *pir*. Over-ridden with emotions and remorse Shaikh Shams took the vow that he would never participate in *sama* ritual again.²² On his way back to Kaliyar Sabir took a halt in Panipat again. He got to know

²⁰ *Dastan Aur Karamat*, p. 32.

²¹ *Irfan-i Sabir*, p. 154.

about Shaikh Shams renunciation of *sama* because of his respect for him. Pleased with Shaikh Shams gesture, Sabir told him that the greatest virtue of a *derwesh* is his ability to sacrifice what is dear to him. You have set an exemplary precedent and redefined the dimension of *pir-murshid* relationship. May God bless you and help you in resisting all worldly pretensions and become an accomplished *dawesh*. He stayed in Panipat for a few more hours and then went back to kaliyar.²³In keeping with a cherished Chishti principle of unbridled devotion to *pir* by the disciple the literature on the *Sabiri silsilah* has used hyperbolic language. Shaikh Shams' renunciation of *sama* as a repentance of his ignorant act has been perceived as a high watermark in the history of the evolution of the *Sabiri silsilah*. Apparently, a strong tradition of intense *pir-murshid* relationship became a normative characteristic of the *silsilah* subsequently. Either it was believed to be a *Chishti-Nizami* ideal which was emulated by the *Sabiris* or it seems to have been an attempt to project a much more intense and intimate ambience of the *Sabiri khanqah* as a part of an equally rich *Chishti* tradition

Shaikh Shams spent his evenings with his disciples and visitors who came from multiple shades and strata of society. Among his ardent followers was a Hindu peasant named Dular. Dular was a peasant with enough resources to lead a contented life. He was, however,

²² Ibid., p. 155.

constantly harassed by the *amil* (revenue collector) of the town. The collector demanded exorbitant cesses from Dular, which the latter failed to pay and took refuge in the *khanqah* of Shaikh Shams. Deeply infuriated, the collector sent his representatives to the *khanqah* asking Shaikh Shams to hand over Dular to him. However, all of his appeals fell in deaf ears. Dular was extremely worried about his fate and sought permission from Shaikh Shams to leave since his presence in *khanqah* was a threat to the *khanqah* and the *pir* himself. Shaikh Shams who was sitting in the meditative state, opened his eyes and asked Dular to assist other *khanqah* mates in the distribution of evening *langer* and be absolutely calm and patient. Dular was overjoyed with his *pir's* response and almost ran towards the kitchen. The *amil* was getting increasingly exasperated and one day he decided to march to Shaikh Shams' *khanqah* in person to capture Dular and reprimand the Shaikh for giving him shelter against royal orders. There is rather a very colourful narrative as to how the collector died mysteriously just at the entrance of *khanqah* and how the band of troops which came beside him made remorseful apologies to the Shaikh.²⁴

The tale, which may indeed be a sheer legend, carries immense significance. There is a striking similarity between this narrative and a

²³ *Dastan Aur Karamat*, p. 34.

²⁴ *Dastan Aur Karamat*, Muhsin Sabiri, p. 37.

famous story of Hazrat Nizamuddin's conflict with Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq. In both instances, the faulty administrators incurred the wrath of Chishtis who apparently were impervious to power and the state politics. Even if it is believed to be a fabricated description, it amply shows that the reconstruction of the *Sabiri* image was done with an assiduous *Chishti* vigour. The symbols deployed to execute this image might have been local but the influence of hegemonic *Nizami* literary traditions is very conspicuous. In another instance, Shaikh Shams wrote a letter to Alauddin Khalji referring to him as *Shahna-i Delhi* and exhorting him to prevent his officers from unleashing terror and corruption on poor peasants. In this description Alauddin Khalji is shown as a supervisor of Delhi and not the Sultan of the time. Moreover, a warning was implicit in the letter asking him to be more humanitarian.²⁵

It is impossible to actually narrate all the traditions pertaining to Shaikh Shams' life and activities in Panipat. The tales of his spiritual attainments and his liberal disposition adequately bespeak of his popular image in the contemporary times. He was a *wali* for the people of Panipat, who redressed their grievances and catered to their spiritual and psychological needs. No intention is made to draw any parallel between *Nizami khanqahs* of Delhi and the *Sabiri khanqah* of Panipat but a caution is in order against being dismissive about the role of *Sabiris* in the life

²⁵ *Dastan Aur Karamat, Muhsin Sabiri, p. 42.*

and psyche of people of rural U.P. Shaikh Shams-ul Turk Panipati spent almost his entire life in Panipat, served the humanity for years and breathed his last in the year 1338 A.D/716 Hijri.²⁶ It was an irretrievable loss to the *Sabiri silsilah*. However, even after his death the *silsilah* proliferated with a phenomenal pace and the focus of activity shifted to the U.P.

SHAIKH KABIR-UL AULIYA

Shaikh Kabir-ul Aulia was another luminous star of the *Sabiri silsilah*. The most beloved disciple of Shaikh Shams, Shaikh Kabir has many contributions to his credit in popularizing and expanding the *silsilah* to a higher and a wider plain. He introduced the *silsilah* to diverse parts of northern India and through his humble, ascetic outlook and wandering nature attracted followers from different regions, cultures and religions.

His original name was Khwaja Muhammad. He was born to Shah Mahmood, an influential landed elite of Panipat.²⁷ He was popular with the title of Shaikh Jalaluddin Panipati in the circles of practicing Sufis of Panipat. Indeed, in early descriptions of his activities in Panipat he is referred to as Shaikh Jalaluddin Panipati . Traditions on his early life would make us believe that he was a born *wali* and started exhibiting his

²⁶ *Iqtibas-ul Anwar*, p. 526.

²⁷ *Iqtibas-ul Anwar*, p. 527.

saintly virtues at a quite an early stage of life.²⁸ He had a usual childhood till the age of seven when he was formally introduced in the study of the *Quran*, *hadis* and Islamic jurisprudence. It marked a sea change in his attitude since now he started devoting his days and nights in reciting the *Quran* and *zikh*.²⁹ A tale of his miraculous experience in his adolescent days is very popular in the “Oral Traditions” of the *Sabiris*. As witnessed and narrated by one of his companions, once Shaikh Kabir was engaged in intense *zikh* before his morning prayers. Shaikh Kabir’s face was red with divine grace. He was completely intoxicated with spiritual ecstasy when a snake fell from the roof on him. In a fraction of second, it was reduced to ashes. The witness was left bewildered and the incident had a deep impact on him. He remained in psychological shock for many days. The news of this incident soon spread in entire Panipat and his *derweshi* nature was universally acknowledged³⁰

According to yet another popular belief, he used to get so involved in spiritual thoughts that he would spend many sleepless nights without a grain of food in his belly.³¹ In similar spirit he would go to deserted places and jungle and get engrossed in his esoteric self so much so that after many days his disciples would bring him back to the town.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 528.

²⁹ *Dastan Aur Karamat, Muhsin Sabiri, p. 67.*

³⁰ Ibid., p. 69.

³¹ *Iqtibas-ul Anwar, p. 528.*

But he would still remain subconscious for some more days.³² In fact, before entering the *Sabiri silsilah*, Shaikh Kabir earned distinction owing to his ascetic tendencies. He exercised so much of rigorous physical constraint that his senses were completely annihilated.³³ He was believed to be the true spiritual successor of Sabir. A tendency emerged to associate his *qalandari* attributes with the divine personality of Sabir. Though, he lacked the *jalal* of Sabir but his extreme commitment to spiritual prayers and devotion to God were true manifestations of the *Sabiri* spiritual tradition.

As mentioned before, Shaikh Kabir was born in one of the most rich and prestigious Muslim families of Panipat. Shaikh Kabir, apart from his wealth also possessed the rare virtue of generosity. His excessive involvement in God was accompanied with his passionate affection for the poor. He preached to his followers to make charity. Even a smile could be a grand charity.³⁴ There are innumerable tales of his acts of generosity which can not be described here. The legend goes that no disabled person would sleep hungry and no girl would remain unmarried because of poverty as long as the benevolent hand of Shaikh Kabir continued to bless Panipat.³⁵

³² *Iqtibas-ul Anwar*, pp. 528-529.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 527.

³⁴ *Dastan Aur Karamat*, p. 70.

³⁵ *Dastan Aur Karamat*, p. 72.

Shaikh Kabir's inclination towards *Sabiri silsilah* was as old as his association with Shaikh Shams. Shaikh Kabir was deeply impressed by Shaikh Shams and kept him in high veneration. He occasionally entered into long discussions with Shaikh Shams on various aspects of Islamic mysticism. In the year 1319 A.D/697 Hijri Shaikh Kabir-ul Auliya finally enrolled himself in the *Sabiri khanqah* of Panipat and received "robe of honour" (*khirqah*) from Shaikh Shams.³⁶

Shaikh Kabir, who was erstwhile known by the name of Jalaluddin Panipati, received the title of Kabir-ul Auliya from his *pir* on the day of his initiation. Shaikh Shams expressed hope and said " O Kabir I could not fulfill the wish of my *pir* of becoming a *mujaddid* (reviver). But it is my earnest hope that you will attain a distinguished position and would take the *silsilah* to unanticipated heights. You will become a *Sabiri mujaddid, Amen*".³⁷ Shaikh Shams then gave Shaikh Kabir's hand in the hand of another eminent sufi named Shaikh Aleemullah Abdal and asked the latter to introduce Shaikh Kabir into the mystical precepts of the *Sabiris*.³⁸

Shaikh Kabir did not belie the hopes his *pir* had been nursing with him. He took the *silsilah* to unprecedented heights and actually acted as a *mujaddid* in spreading the gospels of his spiritual predecessors. In

³⁶ *Haqeeqat-i Gulzar-i Sabiri*, p. 351.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 352.

certain respects he took recourse to the practices which not only brought personal popularity to him but contributed substantially in the geographical spread of the *silsilah*. For instance, unlike his spiritual predecessors Shaikh Kabir extensively traveled northern India to its length and breadth. For forty years Shaikh Kabir travelled indefatigably and performed *hajj* many times.³⁹ His powerful charismatic personality did wonders and soon the ranks of his disciples swelled considerably. Hardly a village was left which was devoid of vigorous activities of Shaikh Kabir's disciples⁴⁰. The statement seems to be exaggerated but it is plausible to assume that Shaikh Kabir's wandering attitude and his oratory skills would have attracted masses towards him and the *silsilah* might have taken stronger roots in the rural interiors of northern India.

Shaikh Kabir was a reputed scholar of Islamic mysticism and a prolific writer. His work "*Zad-o Abrar*" dealt with the intricacies of the concept of "*Wahdat-ul Wujud*"(Unity of Being), esoteric meanings of Quranic injunctions, different degree of spiritual elevation etc.⁴¹ He was a powerful orator and engaged in vivacious discussions with the *Ulema* and convinced most of them with his debating skills on the scriptural legality of the concept of *Wahdat-ul Wujud*.⁴² He was extremely fond of *sama* and

³⁸ *Haqeeqat-I Gulzar-I Sabiri*, pp. 351-352.

³⁹ *Iqtibas-ul Anwar*, p.528.

⁴⁰ *Dastan Aur Karamat*, p.76.

⁴¹ *Iqtibas-ul Anwar*, p. 529.

⁴² *Dastan Aur Karamat*, P. 77.

occasionally attended large *sama* gatherings in his *khanqah*.⁴³ After *sama* ritual he used to be invariably engaged in discussions with the learned people of all religions and faiths including the *Ulema*, *Bhaktas* and *nathpanthi yogis* and would discuss with them the metaphysical issues about the nature of the “Ultimate Reality”, the infallibility of human soul and the inevitability of the doomsday etc.⁴⁴ Shaikh Kabir, indeed, initiated a literary tradition in the *Sabiri* order which was to reach its culmination under Shaikh Abdul Quddus Gangohi. Apparently, he even wrote the biography of his spiritual predecessors. But both his treatises on *Tasawwuf* (mysticism) and his biographical work on Sabir and Shaikh Shams have not come down to us.

In a typical *Sabiri* manner, Shaikh Kabir is also associated with the performance of countless miracles (*karamat*), which are still fresh and surviving in the little oral traditions of the *Sabiri khanqahs* in northern India. A tale goes that on his visit to Malwa Shaikh Kabir found a village which was devastated due to protracted drought condition. The villagers’ plight was so pitiable that they were on the verge of abandoning their village to avoid persecution by the revenue officers. On hearing the news of Shaikh Kabir’s arrival there, all the villagers met him and acquainted him with the situation. Shaikh Kabir asked them to bring their agricultural implements to him for a night. Next morning when the villagers entered

⁴³ *Iqtibas-ul Anwar*, p.529.

the audience hall of the *khanqah*, they found a heap of gold implements lying on the floor. The desertion of that village came to a halt, prosperity restored and the tradition says the village still stands apart for its sustained prosperity to this day.⁴⁵

According to some sources Sultan Sikandar Lodi and his prime minister were deeply impressed with the miraculous power Shaikh Kabir and had granted the Shaikh several villages from Karnal to Jhanjana⁴⁶ It is perhaps the first reference to a *Sabiri* sufi getting any land grant from the state. In fact, Shaikh Kabir owing to his powerful financial background and the land grants was able to maintain a grand *khanqah*, which served *langar* round the clock and became an ultimate refuge to the destitute and beggars.⁴⁷

Shaikh Kabir is regarded as the reviver (*mujaddid*) of the *silsilah*. His contribution to the spread of the *silsilah* is immense. Through his powerful personality, scholarly disposition, generosity and humility, he was able to establish a *khanqah* of great repute. It attracted people from all sections of society and became a centre for the proliferation of *Sabiri* ideals to the far flung areas. However, quite ironically, the *khanqah* also became a breeding ground for intrigues among his sons. After Shaikh's death his two surviving sons contested for

⁴⁴ *Dastan Aur Karamat*, p. 78.

⁴⁵ *Iqtibas-ul Anwar*, p.531.

their father's position. Although the influential citizens of Panipat favoured Shaikh Usman, Sultan Ibrahim Lodi, who came to arbitrate on the dispute, ordered Shaikh Usman to assume the position of the custodian of Shaikh Kabir for the first half of the year and his brothers for the second half. The clash is understandable if it is borne in mind that the tomb yielded a lucrative income and the *khanqah* had vast resources at its disposal. Dissatisfied with the Sultan's ruling the two aspiring leaders and their followers fought a pitched battle, in order to settle their respective rights. Shaikh Usman emerged victorious.⁴⁸ Hence, the decadence set in the order after the death of Shaikh Kabir-ul Auliya. His successors started acting as the rural aristocracy and quite often indulged in power politics. The spiritual glory of the *silsilah* seems to have declined in Panipat but there is no evidence to suggest that it arrested the growth of the *silsilah* in other parts of northern India. The focus of the *Sabiri* activities now shifted to eastern U.P to a place called Rudauli, about 100 kilometers east to Lucknow. Shaikh Abdul Haque, a beloved disciple of Shaikh Kabir established a *Sabiri khanqah* in Rudauli and carried forward the legacy of his spiritual predecessors to the vast rural interiors of eastern U.P.

⁴⁶ *Siyar-ul Aqtab*, Saiyyed Ilahdiya, Lucknow, 1881, pp. 226-229.

⁴⁷ *Dastan Aur Karamat*, p. 80.

⁴⁸ *Siyar-ul Aqtab*, pp. 229-231.

SHAIKH ABDUL HAQUE RUDAULWI

The present popularity of the *Sabiri* order owes much to the efforts of Shaikh Abdul Haque. He was born in Delhi and his father died during his childhood. His elder brother Shaikh Taqiuddin tried to give him the formal religious education but Abdul Haque showed a great desire to discover the secrets of mysticism⁴⁹ After spending many years in various *khanqahs* of Delhi and surrounding regions Shaikh Abdul Haque settled in Panipat and took allegiance at the hand of Shaikh Kabir-ul Auliya. Soon by his commitment to *khanqah* and his personal spiritual achievements he came very close to his *pir* and became his most beloved disciple.⁵⁰ Shaikh Abdul Haque received rigorous spiritual training under his *pir* and the latter introduced him in to the deep mysteries of *Sabiri* mystical beliefs. So intense was the relationship between the two that they used to spend nights and days together in *Zikr* and spiritual prayers.⁵¹ Shaikh Abdul Haque spent many years in his *pir's* *khanqah*. Shaikh Abdul Haque put his *pir* in very high esteem for his generosity and concern for the poor but he was getting increasingly disillusioned by the lavish display of wealth by some of his followers. He was completely disgusted when one of his fellow disciples invited him for dinner and served a very grand dinner which was against the *khanqah* ethics. One night he put back his robe of

⁴⁹ *Siyar-ul Aqtab*, p. 184.

⁵⁰ *Iqtibas-ul Anwar*, p. 528.

⁵¹ *Dastan Aur Karamat*, p. 88.

khilafat (khirqa) and left the *khanqah* in disappointment but lost his way in a jungle. While sleeping, he dreamt of an angel to whom he asked the way out of the jungle. The angel asked him to go to his *pir*, he will show the way to attain happiness.⁵² He immediately got up and rushed back to his *pir*. At his arrival to the *khanqah* he saw his *pir* was standing at the door and waiting for him. Shaikh Abdul Haque was aggrieved of repentance. He fell at the feet of Shaikh Kabir and explained his dislike for the ostentatious life style of some of the *khanqah* mates. Apparently, Shaikh Kabir asked him to ignore the malice in the *khanqah* and concentrate on his spiritual life. It seems that Shaikh Abdul Haque could not cope with the intrigues among Shaikh Kabir's sons and the hypocrites in the *khanqah*. Shaikh Kabir who was at his death bed, asked his beloved disciple to leave and establish himself anywhere he wished.⁵³

From Panipat, Shaikh Abdul Haque went to Sunam. In the nearby mosque there lived a *majzub*⁵⁴. Since the *majzub* was slightly mentally deranged and was not capable of earning his livelihood, the entire neighbourhood took care of his needs. Shaikh Abdul Haque who used to perform his prayers in that mosque got very impressed with the *majzub* and started spending time with him. Once when Shaikh Abdul Haque was sharing food with him, another *majzub* from Khurasan came into the mosque and

⁵² *Iqtibas-ul Anwar*, p. 535.

⁵³ *Dastan Aur Karamat*, p. 81.

⁵⁴ *Majzub* is a wandering sufi who remains in a disturbed mental state due to his excessive involvement in God. According to popular belief the uttered words of a *majzub* are bound to be true.

shouted at his fellow majzub lamenting “You have betrayed your country and come here, now I have come here to destroy your country”.⁵⁵

Completely startled, Shaikh Abdul Haque returned home. The saintly old woman, who had given shelter to him, came up to him and said “O derwesh, I saw fish dying in a pond in my dreams” Shaikh Abdul Haque interpreted both the incidents and told Fatima, the old lady, that her dream vindicate the curse of Khurasani majzub . Sunam and Delhi are on the brink of devastation. Soon after Timur’s armies laid waste the whole of Punjab and Delhi. And Shaikh Abdul Haque migrated to Bengal.

It will be ahistorical to say that Timur invaded Hindustan because of the curse of Khurasani Majzub, but the interesting aspect of this curious narrative is the perpetuation of such legends down the centuries. In the popular imagination of lay followers of the Sabiri silsilah, even the greatest political events occurred due to the will of God which He executed through the pious souls of accomplished walis. The faith reposed by them in these legends makes them appear real and genuine. And the tradition goes on incessantly to this day.

Shaikh Abdul Haque stayed in Bengal for some more years but left it due to disturbed political conditions. Initially he stayed in Bihar and Awadh, finally settling down in Rudauli. At Rudauli, the Shaikh led the traditional ascetic existence of a mystic. This took the form of constant refusals of land grants for either his khanqah or his family. Once his son-in-law accepted a order of a gift from the muqta of Rudauli. So infuriated was the Shaikh when

⁵⁵ *Iqtibas-ul Anwar*, p. 537.

he discovered the gift, he tore the paper into shreds and ordered that not a single piece remain in his khanqah⁵⁶ On another occasion a qazi of Sultan Ibrahim Sharqi presented another farman of the gift of a number of villages from his ruler. Firmly, the Shaikh refused the offer, saying that as God provided food for Sultan Ibrahim, his elephants and his horses, he believed he could also be trusted to feed himself and his descendents.⁵⁷

In order to illustrate the hardships a Sufi was required to undergo, Shaikh Abdul Haque gave a practical demonstration. He asked a disciple to dig a hole in the ground and fill it with water. Then he asked him to fill the hole with pebbles and remove them one by one and the disciple followed his command. Taking out some mud, the Shaikh then poured into the hole. The disciple was asked to take out the mud as he had the pebbles, but by the that time it had all been dissolved. He was expected to lose himself in divine, the Shaikh told his disciple, like the mud in the water, and also to simultaneously efface himself in order to become a Sufi.⁵⁸

Once Shaikh Abdul Haque remarked that Hallaj had been a child to disclose divine secrets and some Sufis were so mature that they could drink an ocean of divine secrets and reveal nothing.⁵⁹ Shaikh Abdul Haque showed great interest to *pas-i anfas* (breath control) and the key word before and after prayer was "*Haqq*" (one of the names of Allah). Whether they were talking or buying

⁵⁶ *Anwar-ul Uyun*, Shaikh Abdul Quddus Gangohi, Delhi, 1894, pp. 10-13.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39.

⁵⁹ *Dastan Aur Karamat*, p. 87.

and selling in the market, the Shaikh's disciples would cry "*Haqq*". Many people were critical of such custom, calling it *pir* worship, but the Shaikh justified it by quoting from the *Futuh-at-ul Makkayya* of Ibn al-Arabi.⁶⁰

Shaikh Abdul Haque died in the year 1434 A.D/837 Hijri. Among his many disciples the most prominent was Shaikh Bakhtiyar. Formerly the slave of a jewel merchant, after enrolling himself as a disciple of Shaikh Abdul Haque he became his *pir*'s obedient and beloved disciple. Even after his initiation as a mystic, Shaikh Bakhtiyar continued to trade. It strongly suggests that Shaikh Abdul Haque was not opposed to a sufi earning a good income while simultaneously living as a practicing Sufi.⁶¹

Shaikh Arif, Shaikh Abdul Haque's son, was his spiritual successor. Shaikh Arif was also a poet and a man of great tolerance to different ideas.⁶² His son Shaikh Muhammad, was *pir* to Shaikh Abdul Quddus Gangohi, the greatest of Chishti-Sabiri sufi of the sixteenth century.

⁶⁰ Anwar-ul Uyun, pp. 49-50.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 52.

⁶² *Dastan Aur Karamat*, p. 91.

CHAPTER THREE

CONSOLIDATION OF THE SILSILAH

SHAIKH ABDUL QUDDUS GANGOHI

Shaikh Abdul Quddus Gangohi can rightly be regarded as the most prominent Sufi of the *Sabiri silsilah* after Ali Sabir Kaliyari. With his rise in the contemporary circles of Islamic *tasawwuf*, the evolution of the *silsilah* can be ascertained with greater certainty. His contribution as a distinguished scholar, his visionary approach towards the state and society and his endeavours to reconcile '*Shariat*' and '*Tariqat*' were significant developments. His inquisitive attempts to explore the affinities between Islamic *tasawwuf* and mystical beliefs of various sects of Hinduism and Jainism placed the *sabiri silsilah* on a unique plane and the *silsilah* became a typical representation of the Chishti traditions of religious syncretism.

Shaikh Abdul Quduus came from Rudauli and was born about 1456. His father Shaikh Ismail was an '*alim*' but he had very cordial relations with Shaikh Abdul Haque Rudaulwi. It was quite ironical that despite having grown up in an orthodox Sunni family he showed keen interest in the mysteries of Islamic *tasawwuf*. From his childhood, Shaikh Abdul Quddus was drawn to a life of asceticism and

although he obtained a formal education in Islamic law, jurisprudence, *Hadis* etc from eminent '*ulema*' Shaikh his instinctive interest was in the intricacies of *Wahdat-ul Wujud*.¹

Shaikh Abdul Quddus was born in an orthodox sunni family of Rudauli. His father Shaikh Ismail was a renowned authority in Islamic jurisprudence and his grandfather Shaikh Saifuudin, was a contemporary of Shaikh Abdul Haque Rudaulwi. The Shaikh traced his genealogy to Imam Abu Hanifa², the preceptor of one of the legal school of thoughts of Islam. Such a pedigree and the environment of his household was to make lasting effects on the personality of the Shaikh and his inclination towards *Shariat* and orthodox dogma could not be removed even at the height of popularity as an accomplished Sufi.

Shaikh Abdul Quddus was initiated into the *Sabiri silsilah* of Shaikh Abdul Haque Rudaulwi. The sources characterize him as an '*Uwaisi*' meaning that he acquired discipleship through the esoteric blessings of a deceased *wali*, without having a real *pir*.³ Shaikh Abdul Quddus was deeply devoted to Shaikh Abdul Haque and apparently sought inspiration and guidance from the divine soul of Shaikh Abdul Haque.⁴

¹ Shaikh Ruknuddin, *Lataif-i Quddusi*, Delhi, 1894, p. 30.

² Shaikh Ikram Quddusi, *Iqtibas-ul Anwar*, urdu translation by Ilhaj Khudabaksh Siyal Sabiri, Lahore, 1895, p. 604.

³ Shaikh Ikram Quddusi, *Iqtibas- il Anwar*, p. 603.

⁴ *Iqtibas-ul Anwar*, p. 592.

In order to have a living *pir* as a mentor he obtained initiation from Shaikh Muhammad, a spiritual grandfather of Shaikh Abdul Haque. In his dream Shaikh Abdul Quddus asked his *pir* to instruct him in certain spiritual practices. Shaikh Abdul Haque told him to formally take allegiance in the *Sabiri* Khanqah of Rudauli at the hands of his grandson.⁵ He decided to dedicate his life to the service of Shaikh Abdul Haque's *khanqah* and to remain unmarried the whole life.⁶ To avoid the constant pressure from her family to get married, he tended to spend every possible moment in prayers and meditation. Shaikh Abdul Quddus was finally married to the younger sister of his *pir* and the legend goes that Shaikh Muhammad's mother was instructed by Shaikh Abdul Haque for such matrimonial alliance. And apparently Shaikh Abdul Quddus agreed to marry at the command of his spiritual mentor.⁷ While on his death bed Shaikh Muhammad appointed Shaikh Abdul Quddus as his successor and bestowed upon him *Khirq-i Khilafat* (scepter of leadership).⁸ He seems to have written his two most significant works at Rudauli.

In the year 1491 Shaikh Abdul Quddus migrated to Shahbad, in Ambala near Delhi. In 1492 his son Ruknuddin, the commentator of *Rusdnama* and *Lataif-i Quddusi* was born.⁹ The reasons for the

⁵ *ibid.*, p.592.

⁶ Azeez Hasan, *Irfani-i Sabir*, Saharanpur, 1984, p. 53

⁷ *Iqtibas-ul Anwar*, p. 592.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.594.

⁹ *Lataif-i Quddusi*, p. 31.

Shaikh's migration, as mentioned in *Lataif-i Quddusi*, very emotional. It is written that that Rudauli had succumbed to the infiltration of infidels (*kafirs*), Islamic practices vanished and pork was openly sold in the market. So concerned was the Shaikh that he left Rudauli for Sultan Sikandar Lodi's camp at Nakhna. Indeed, it was a time of great political turbulence in Rudauli. The Rajput invasions of Rudauli and other predominantly Muslim towns in the Sharqi kingdoms were common occurrences. In the life time of Shaikh Abdul Haque Rudauli was invaded by a neighbouring Rajput chief.¹⁰ Rudauli also became a battle ground for the incessant battles between Sharqi rulers and Lodis. One of the Shaikh's servants informed Umar Khan Sherwani, the *wazir* of Sultan Sikandar, of the situation, and he invited him to settle in his *paragana* of Shahbad. It would appear, however that the move was precipitated more by expedient than pious motives and that it was Umar Khan's offer of hospitality rather than the threat to Islam in Rudauli that prompted Shaikh's migration. He stayed in Shahbad for nearly thirty eight years and finally migrated to Gangoh where he died in the year 1537.¹¹

Despite the ideological bias against maintaining a distance from the state, Shaikh Abdul Quddus could not completely remain indifferent to the political convulsions of the time. In a characteristic

¹⁰ Shaikh Abdul Quddus Gangohi, *Anwar-ul Uyum*, urdu Tr., Delhi, 1894, p. 24.

¹¹ *Irfan-i Sabir*, p. 53.

Chishti manner he refused to accept any material assistance or political patronage. His family faced a severe economic crisis often starving for days. But like many other outstanding Sufis, the Shaikh's meditation was unperturbed by such a situation.¹² However, the political elites invariably strove to acquire his intercession for divine grace and legitimize their political authority.¹³ The relationship between Shaikh Abdul Quddus and Umar Khan Sherwani was long standing. When Umar Khan's relations deteriorated with Sultan Sikandar the former sought shelter in the *Sabiri Khanqah* of Rudauli. There Shaikh Abdul Quddus prayed that Umar Khan's fortune might change. Soon after he was reconciled with the prince.

After settling in Shahbad, Shaikh Abdul Quddus visited Ajodhan and Multan. He seems to have visited Delhi more than once and maintained a good rapport with Sultan Sikandar Lodi. In a letter to Sultan, the Shaikh reminded him of his duties as a ruler. His advice was based on the traditional Perso-Islamic political theories defined by Imam Ghazali, but it marked a departure from the traditional Chishti practice of unreserved distance in politics. Shaikh Abdul Quddus wrote to Sikandar Lodi that an hour spent by rulers in pursuit of justice was more commendable than sixty hours of prayers by others. He maintained that a mutual inter-dependence existed between religious

¹² *Lataif-i Quddusi*, p. 31.

¹³ *ibid.*, p.53.

faith and the well-being of the state. In the absence of Sultan anarchy would prevail. Communities needed kings as body needed the soul. Sultans were distinguished as they were the 'shadow of God on earth'. If a Sultan neglected to protect the weak, the holy, the 'Ulema' and mystics, the world would become anarchic.¹⁴

Babur's victory over Dipa'pur and Lahore in 1523-24 made regions around Delhi exceedingly unsafe. According to Shaikh Ruknuddin, a large number of 'Ulema' and holy men were killed and their libraries destroyed.¹⁵ A lot of Punjabi families moved to safer areas and amongst the emigrants was the Shaikh who settled at Gangoh in the Saharanpur District of UP. Meanwhile, Babur marched towards Panipat where the Mughal forces were opposed by Ibrahim Lodi. Shaikh Abdul Quddus and his family accompanied the rear of Ibrahim Lodi's army for safety. Sultan Ibrahim had the Shaikh brought to camp where the latter predicted his defeat. The Shaikh told his disciples to flee to the eastern districts. Only the Shaikh, his son and a Saiyyed servant remained at Afghan camp. After Ibrahim Lodi's defeat at Panipat in 1526, the three were captured and taken to Delhi where they were released by Babur. Leaving Delhi the Shaikh retired to Gangoh where he remained for the rest of his life. Shaikh Abdul Quddus wrote a letter to Babur, requesting the emperor to honour the 'Ulema', Sufis and the

¹⁴ Shaikh Abdul Quddus, *Maktubat-i Quddusiya, Delhi, 1871, p. 44.*

¹⁵ *Lataif-i Quddusi*, pp. 63-64.

weak. He also commented that the imposition of different cesses on Sufis and the holy men was a heinous sin. The tax should be remitted so that all the people who have fallen to this category could live peacefully and pray for the prosperity of the emperor and the Muslim community.¹⁶

A conspicuous orthodox bias is clearly articulated by Shaikh Abdul Quddus in his letter to Babur. He asked Babur to model revenue organisation on the traditions of the *Khulfa-i Rashidin*, the first four Caliphs, and their successors. Only the pious should be appointed as Government officers so that revenue could be collected according to the rules, laid down in the *Shariat*. No *kafir* should be appointed to any post of revenue organisation. They should receive no financial assistance from the state and remain in miserable conditions. *Kafirs* should be forced to pay regular revenue and taxes on their agricultural and commercial undertakings, their dress should differ from Muslims, their worship should be secret and they should not openly indulge in heretical practices. They should not draw their salaries from the royal treasury and confine their activities to their traditional trades and professions. Equal treatment with Muslims was not to be given in the interests of Islam.¹⁷

¹⁶ *Irfan-i Sabir*, p-53.

¹⁷ *Maqtubat-i Quddusiya*, pp. 236-37.

Shaikh Abdul Quddus's political letters to Babur pose a very contradictory situation. In his other writings he has invariably emphasized the affinity between the Islamic mystical traditions and the *Bhakti* sects of Hinduism. His works in explicating the doctrine of *Wahdat-ul Wujud* and its amenability and compatibility with the philosophy of Gorakhnath appears to be a landmark in the evolution of Indo-Islamic literary syncretism. However, quite paradoxically, his views on the politico-economic conditions were inconsistent and extreme and the result of a Sufi theorist indulging in politics in a polarized fashion. It seems that his vindictive attitude was prompted by the imposition of '*Ushr*'¹⁸ on the property held by the '*Ulema*' and the Sufis, and like many he considered the Hindu officers of the *diwan* responsible for the financial difficulties of the upper Muslim classes.

Another letter was written by Shaikh Abdul Quddus to Prince Humayun recommending that he should accord honourable status to the '*Ulema*' and Sufis. Humayun paid a visit to Shaikh's *khanqah* in Gangoh¹⁹ In the year 1537 Shaikh Abdul Quddus died and was succeeded by his son Shaikh Ruknuddin . Shaikh Ruknuddin was , however, very critical of Humayun's religious policy. He accused Humayun of not making a distinction between '*kufr*' and Islam.²⁰

¹⁸ One tenth of the produce

¹⁹ *Lataif-i Quddusi*, p. 70.

²⁰ *ibid*, pp. 79-81.

Shaikh Abdul Quddus' life experiences and activities demonstrate some very curious dimensions of his thought and attitude towards the religio-political conditions of the time. He earnestly endeavoured to bridge the gulf between the 'Shariat' and 'Tariqat' and tried to justify the controversial precept of *Wahdat-ul Wujud* in the light of Sunni orthodox dogma. In one instance, Humayun took a team of Khurasani and Hindustani *Ulema and Sufis* to the *khanqah* of Shaikh Abdul Quddus' to understand the nuances of both Sunni orthodoxy and Islamic mysticism. A heated discussion followed Shaikh Abdul Quddus explained the discrepancies between the two and minutely discussed the inevitability of conciliation of the two as both of them complemented each other.²¹

What were the probable reasons for the evolution of Abdul Quddus' thought is difficult to comprehend. Perhaps the Shaikh, despite his deep commitment to the *Sabiri-Chishti* traditions of humility and spiritual devotion to God, could not resist the inexorable force of Sunni orthodoxy. In his personal belief he remained to be a practicing Sufi, often living in starvation conditions and spending nights in the *zikr* of God. However, his political consciousness did make him a champion of Muslim community. This inconsistency was inherent in the politico-religious logic of the age. The shift from a humble, isolative and indifferent existence to the one of political

²¹ *Irfan-i Sabir*, p. 54.

consciousness was spearheading speedily. The trend which was established by Hazrat Bahauddin Zakariya Suhrawardi and Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya was successfully carried out by Shaikh Abdul Quddus and reached its culmination with the advent of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi in the time of Akbar. Hence, the changing attitude of the *Sabiris* in the context of their increased involvement in the state politics, as typified by Shaikh Abdul Quddus, can best be explained as a part of historical evolution of Sufism , in India.

Shaikh Abdul Quddus surpassed his predecessors and attained unprecedented popularity among the masses. He had maximum number of disciples among all the *sabiri* Sufis. We have substantial literary accounts at our disposal on his life and activities. All previous Sabiri Sufis were characterized by their *jalali* (full of wrath) personalities. Though, moderation came about in the time of Shaikh Abdul Haque Rudaulwi but the *Sabiri* integration at a larger plane with other *silsilahs* was incomplete. Shaikh Abdul Quddus introduced *jamal* (serene grace) into the *silsilah*²² and universalized the *Sabiri* precepts among other Sufi orders and the masses. He took keen interest and devised new ways to impart spiritual training to his disciples. The erstwhile loose-knit organisation of the *khanqah* was transformed into a very disciplined and systematic institution. *Sabiri* doctrines were formally codified and popularized among the followers . The number of

regional centres of Sabiri activities rose astonishingly and the *silsilah* attained a more systematic, sophisticated and well entrenched position among the rural masses.²³ The *khanqah* establishment of Shaikh Abdul Quddus was huge and comprised of hundreds of disciples and innumerable followers. Shaikh Abdul Quddus consciously endeavoured to disseminate *Sabiri* ideals to distant regions and had a massive following in different parts of northern India. Among his disciples who took the *silsilah* to the nooks and corners of northern India were Shaikh Jalal Thaneshwari, Saiyyed Ghafoor Azampuri, Saiyyed Abdus Sattar Saharanpuri. The organised spiritual training, imparted by Shaikh Abdul Quddus Gangohi to these disciples proved to be vital and these regional centres became breeding ground for a very vigorous, organised *Khanqah* activities.²⁴

Shaikh Abdul Quddus exercised profound influence on other contemporary Sufi orders. According to Shaikh Ruknuddin, he even got enrolled into other Sufi *silsilahs* also. Interestingly, Shaikh Ahad (Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi's father) sought allegiance in the Sabiri *khanqah* of Shaikh Abdul Quddus. Shaikh Ahad travelled the entire breadth of northern India from Rohtas to Bengal in pursuit of wisdom and spiritual blessings of famous *Ulema* and Sufis. As a young man he visited Abdul Quddus at Gangoh who taught him *zikr* and advised him

²² *Irfan-i Sabir*, p.55.

²³ *ibid.*, p. 54.

to attain his formal education before embarking further on the Sufi path. By the time Shaikh Ahad completed his formal education, Shaikh Abdul Quddus died. Later, he was received into the *silsilah* by Shaikh Ruknuddin.²⁵

Shaikh Abdul Quddus wrote profusely on the multiple aspects of *Tasawwuf*. His major works include *Rushdnamà* which was further elaborated by his son Shaikh Ruknuddin. *Maktubat-i Quddusiya* is a collection of his letters which not only highlight his attitude towards the state but also give adequate idea of his approach towards different belief systems of the time. *Anwar-ul Uyun* is another work of Shaikh Abdul Quddus which sheds ample light on his experiences and life events.

Shaikh Abdul Quddus had a passionate interest in the classical works on *Yoga* and other mystical aspects of Hinduism. He used *Alakh* as his Hindi *nom de plume*. The Shaikh had an extensive knowledge of the Arabic and Persian versions of *Amrit Kunda*, which was widespread before the translation by Shaikh Muhammad Ghaus. The Shaikh began the tradition of exploring the affinities between the *yogic* practices of Hinduism and the Sufic concept of *Wahdat-ul Wujud*. Shaikh Abdul Quddus found the teachings of the Naths identical to the *Wahdat-ul Wujud*. According to Gorakhnath the

²⁴ *Irfan-i Sabir*, p. 54.

²⁵ *Iqtibas-ul Anwar*, p. 617.

Absolute Truth realised in the highest spiritual experience is above the concept of *bhava* and *abhava* (negation of existence), absolutely devoid of origination and destruction, and beyond the reach of all speculation and imagination. This is *para-Brahma*, which is without name, form, ego, causality or activity, self-manifestation or internal and external differences. This philosophy of Gorakhnath and the Siddhas called *dwaita-dwaita-vilakshanavada* is nearest to the concept of *Wahdat-ul Wujud*. The simile of the relationship between river water and bubbles applied to the Naths could also be used to explain *Wahdat-ul Wujud*²⁶

More Hindi verses in support of the *Wahdat-ul Wujud* were added by the Shaikh in the *Rusdnama*. He argued that steam rising from a river is called vapour, when it rests in atmosphere it is called a cloud, if water from the clouds fall into a vessel it is known as water of whatever receptacle it finds itself, if it falls in the form of rain it is known as rain water. Duality, according to Shaikh Abdul Quddus is a false concept and the idea of anything besides God is misguided. People should only believe in Unity of Being.²⁷

Indeed, many verses of *Rusdnama* show the doctrinal similarity between the philosophy of Ibn-I Arabi and that of Gorakhnath.

The *pas-i Anfas*, founded on the *yogic pranayam* and the ontological physiology of the Naths were subjects around which the

²⁶ S.A.A, Rizvi, *A History Of Sufism in India, vol-1, Delhi, 1978, pp. 339-340.*

²⁷ *Lataif-i Quddusi, pp. 12-14.*

Shaikh wrote a number of eloquent verses, and his arguments were presented very forcefully. Quoting the Sufi belief that those who had no human pir were disciples of the devil, in a Hindi verse the Shaikh said that if a blind man led another blind man, both were bound to fall into a well. A ceaseless effort was needed to find a perfect guru whom the Shaikh likened to a diamond mine-unless it was dug patiently and assiduously, the diamonds would never be found.²⁸

Shaikh Abdul Quddus, in keeping with the perfect spirit of *Chishti-Sabiri* tradition, set great ideals of devotion and spiritual practices. Besides obligatory prayers, the Shaikh could perform four hundred *rakats*²⁹ of namaz during the day and four hundred *rakats* at night. The clothes covering his knees would be thread bare from kneeling. Winter's excessive cold and frost were no obstacles to his praying. After performing the evening namaz he would begin his *zikr*. Those who joined him would tire, but the Shaikh's absorption in the *Wahdat-ul Wujud* failed to quench his enthusiasm. For years after the evening *namaz* he would perform the *namaz-i makus*. This was carried out by hanging, probably head downward, and was generally continued the whole night.³⁰

²⁸ *A History of Sufism in India*, pp. 341-342.

²⁹ The word comes from *ruku* or the inclination of the head in prayers with the palm of the hand resting on the knees.

³⁰ *Lataif-i Quddusi*, pp, 15-16.

The Shaikh's interest in Nath teaching was not merely theoretical. In several ways he found Nath ascetic exercises compatible with Chishti practices. Shaikh Abdul Quddus considered *namaz-i makus* to be a counterpart of the *ulti-sadhna*³¹. Continual performance of *namaz-i makus* produced in the Shaikh a condition he called *Sultan-i zikr* in which one experienced strange changes in the physical and spiritual conditions including annihilation of senses and a lack of feeling of consciousness. Repeated appearances of the *Sultan-i zikr* led to the state of *fana al-fana*. A description of this spiritual experience, given by Shaikh Ruknuddin, would tend to indicate that *Sultan-i zikr* was comparable to the Nath Siddha's *nad*,³² and that *fana al-fana* was a state experience by the *Jeevanmukta*.

Sultan-i zikr, Shaikh Ruknuddin's description continued, would appear just before waking. During that period external senses were very weak, the inner contemplation made wakefulness and sleep appear identical. Later the state would reappear during consciousness. Initially the contemplative was quite frightened, but gradually they became accustomed to the condition. The seeker of God waited for the reappearance of this state in which he could simultaneously perceive both the entire world and identify those who were obsessed with it. Sometime the meditator lost consciousness of himself as a spatial entity

³¹ A complete inversion of all psycho-physiological processes .

³² A mystic voice.

and was plunged into the state of *fana al-fana*. Shaikh Ruknuddin then compared the condition of *Sultan-i zikr* with that experienced by the prophet Muhammad when he received divine messages. In short, he added that at the commencement of *Sultan-i zikr* the meditator felt as if he were listening to the humming of a bell whose song then gradually became thunderous.³³

Shaikh Abdul Quddus is also credited with the discovery of the lost grave of Sabir. Towards the end of his life Sabir migrated to the jungle, four *kos* adjacent to Kaliyar and gave audience to his followers on Thursdays. After his death Kaliyar deserted completely and the grave of Sabir got lost in the jungle. Once during the regular interaction in the *khanqah*, one of Shaikh Abdul Quddus' disciple asked "O Shaikh where is the shrine of Sabir, whose teachings we follow and whose soul inspires our deeds?" Shaikh Abdul Quddus felt embarrassed and was taken over by a deep sense of guilt. In the meanwhile, Sabir came in his dreams and through his esoteric communication asked him to pay a visit to his grave.³⁴

It is believed that the grave of Sabir was protected by a thunderbolt and none except the forest animals could withstand the *jalali* radiance of Sabir's grave. If anybody tried to enter the premise of

³³ *Lataif-i Quddisi*, pp. 216-17.

³⁴ Mohsin Sabiri, *Dastan Aur Karamat*, Haridwar, 1984, p.134.

his grave, he used to be burnt to ashes by the thunderbolt.³⁵ At approaching Kaliyar, a thunderbolt suddenly appeared and tried to dissuade Shaikh Abdul Quddus. The Shaikh raised his hands and said “I am a slave of Sabir and have come to visit him at his command”³⁶. The lightning disappeared. In a legendary description, the water of Yamuna stopped, the sky turned red, the forest animals ran away and a powerful storm came when Shaikh Abdul Quddus conveyed his *salam* (regards) to Sabir.³⁷ The reply came immediately, the soul of Sabir appeared before Shaikh Abdul Quddus and gave him blessings. Shaikh Abdul Quddus said “ O *pir-i kamil* (the greatest master), you have fulfilled my greatest wish by giving me your blessings. Like me there are thousands of your slaves who want to get benefit from your divine grace by visiting your grave.” Consequently, through the intercession of Shaikh Abdul Quddus, Sabir gave permission to build a shrine on his grave³⁸. Ever since the followers started thronging the shrine with indefatigable enthusiasm and within a few years the shrine of Sabir became a powerful regional cult, inspiring innumerable *Sabiri* Sufis and lay followers to carry forward his ideals of patience and devotion.

³⁵ *ibid.*, p.136.

³⁶ *Irfan-i Sabir*, pp-184-185.

³⁷ *Dastan Aur Karamat*, p.139.

³⁸ *Irfan-i Sabir*, pp. 187-188.

CONCLUSION

The *Sabiri silsilah* continues to be a living epitome of Chishti traditions of syncretism, religious tolerance and excessive devotion to God. Surprisingly, the *silsilah* which began as an insignificant parallel of mainstream Nizami *silsilah* reached unanticipated heights. In keeping with the spirit of their predecessors the *Sabiri* Sufis are still engaged in vigorous *khanqah* activities across the sub-continent. Perhaps it was the rural character of the *silsilah* which has contributed to its unperturbed tradition of faith and devotion. And innumerable shrines of the *Sabiri* Sufis in the vast interiors of U.P, Haryana, Uttranchal and for that matter in Pakistan bear ample testimony to the fact that these Sufis remained an integral part of the belief system of the rural folk.

The life and traditions of Ali Sabir Kaliyari set a doctrinal paradigm for the subsequent *Sabiri Shaikhs*. His excessive involvement in spiritual meditation, awe-inspiring personality and miraculous feats became a source of continuous inspiration for the generations of his followers. The legends pertaining to his life have amply demonstrated his constant struggle to seek recognition in the face of dogged resistance posed by the *Ulema*. However, he was able to attain a position of distinguished *wali* by virtue of his unparalleled commitment to devotion of God and his ascetic virtues. Lack of any organised *khanqah* activity and absence of a vast number of

disciples prevented any systematic recording of his activities. Moreover the rural outlook of the *silsilah* deprived it from a rich literary tradition which largely account for under representation of Sabir in the contemporary accounts.

Shaikh Shams-ul Turk, the only disciple of Shaikh Sabir, established himself in Panipat and began organised *khanqah* activities. Apparently, his miraculous experiences earned him massive popularity. The legend pertaining to the miracle he performed in Jalaluddin Khalji's army shows the prevalent Chishti moorings of maintaining a distance from the state.

However, as the sources would make us believe, he remained deeply attached to his *pir* and gave a new dimension to the *pir-murid* relationship. He tended to replicate his *pir* in righteousness and excessive devotion to God.

Shaikh Kabir-ul Auliya, rightly regarded as the reviver of *silsilah* contributed substantially to the popularization of *Sabiri* precepts. Known for his generosity and characteristic *Sabiri* asceticism Shaikh Kabir commanded great respect among the masses. His wandering attitude helped in the proliferation of the *silsilah* to the far off places of northern India.

Shaikh Abdul Haque Rudaulwi took the *silsilah* to eastern U.P and it marked the beginning of a very vigorous *khanqah* activities in the rural interiors of that region. He through his charismatic personality took his

silsilah to great heights. He believed in maintaining distance from the state and refused to take any material assistance. By his personal humility, asceticism and uprightness he infused a new vigour into the *silsilah* and assertively defended the concept of *Wahdat-ul Wujud* against the onslaught of the *Ulema*.

With the rise of Shaikh Abdul Quddus Gangohi in the early sixteenth century the *silsilah* attained unprecedented popularity. Unlike his predecessors, he actively reflected on the contemporary political issues and maintained cordial relations with Sikandar Lodi. After the advent of the Mughals he wrote letters to Babur urging him to be considerate with the learned men including the *Ulema* and Sufis. Indeed, his orthodox pedigree accompanied with his deep inclinations towards the esoteric aspects of Islamic *Tasawwuf* prompted him to bridge the gulf between *Shariat* and *Tariqat*.

Shaikh Abdul Quddus took keen interest in the classical works on Yoga and Hindu mystical traditions. He embarked upon exploring the similarities between Yogic practices of Hinduism and the theory of *Wahdat-ul Wujud*. His *Rushdnama* elaborates upon multiple dimensions of Islamic mysticism and the philosophy of Gorakhnath.

Shaikh Abdul Quddus believed in the rigorous training of his disciples. He maintained a big khanqah and inculcated a new discipline and

organisation in it. Among all *Sabiris* he had the maximum number of disciples who preached the *Sabiri* gospels to erstwhile untapped regions.

The work in itself leave many questions unanswered. However, I have endeavoured to put my best efforts to initiate a study on a very rich tradition of faith and devotion. Further sincere efforts are required to derive more meaningful analysis of the legends and “Oral Traditions” pertaining to Sabir and his successors. A more minute evaluation of the primary sources and anthropological perspective to the study of legends can possibly help in reconstructing the evolution of the *silsilah* on a much more concrete basis.

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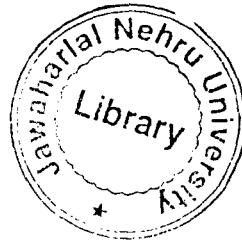
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