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Reading Faw'id-al-Fu'ad:Text, testimony and history

Abstract

For nearly seven hundred years, Fawa'id-UI-Fu'ad by Ameer Hassan Ala Sijli Dehlavi has been acknowledged as among the earliest examples of the genre of Malfuzat, which enjoys such a long afterlife in Sufi-literary culture. It is also held that unlike many later Malfuzat, which establishes the value of the text as a reliable historical document from the Tughlaq Shahi period of the medieval Indian history.

In this paper, I shall examine how the question of the historical reliability of Fawa'id-UI-Fu'ad exists in a complementary relationship with that of personal testimony. Whereas, it is generally believed that historiography, in order to be reliable, must elide the historian, in Fawa'id-UI-Fu'ad, it is the presence of Hassan Sijli that gives the assurance of reliability. But Hassan Sijli is not a historian like contemporary court chroniclers such as Ameer Khusrao or Ziauddin Barani, whose relationship with the regimes they describe, is official and formal, indeed secular. In Sijli's case, his relationship with what he records is certainly imbued with a sense of the historical, but mediated by a Pir-Murid (mentor-disciple) relationship, itself founded on an act of faith. I shall try in this paper to establish the usefulness of reading Fawa'id-UI-Fu'ad as the work of murid-historian, comparable with, yet wholly distinct from the official historiography of the Sultanate period.

Key words: Faw'id-al-Fu'ad, Ameer Hassan Ala Sijzi, Malfuzat, historiography, pir-murid

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Introduction

Amir Hassan Ala Sijzi was almost the first writer who compiled a cohesive book with a very simple and fluent prose form Hazrat Nizamuddin Aulia's Malfuzat .

Although he has a great collection of Persian Ghazals, Odes, Mathnavi, and Quatrains, His major Significance lays upon this Malfuzat.

This book is of such splendour that Hassan's Contemporary poet, Amir Khosrow Dehlavi, Suggested to exchange all his works for Hassan's book, Faw'id-al-Fu'ad.

Since this book has been of great importance in the subcontinent, and especially among those writers in Persian and Sufis, I will explore through it in this article.

I

The Silence of Faw'id-al-Fu'ad

There are three reasons for the preeminence that Faw'id-al-Fu'ad (1307-1322) by Amir Hasan Sijzi Dehlavi (1253-1336) has enjoyed for over seven hundred years.(Ghani 1941) Though not the first example of malfuzat literature in the south Asian Persian, nor the first Chishti mystical text, the chief claim to preeminence of Faw'id-al-Fu'ad is that it is the only accurate record of the conversations of Nizam ud-Din Aulia (1242-1325). While the first three masters of the Chishti silsila in India did not leave behind any comparable record of their public discourses, Faw'id-al-Fu'ad, for the first time gave a coherent narrative form to the ideas and practices of the Chishtis, established their authority within a wider Islamic theological and ecumenical tradition, and marked the beginning of the transition from oral to literary transmission in south Asian sufi culture.

These achievements of Faw'id-al-Fu'ad were of course, timely. It was during Nizam ud-Din's lifetime and under his guidance that the Chishti network spread across Punjab, Awadh, Gujarat and the Deccan, becoming in a short span of time the most popular sufi movement in south Asia. In such circumstances, a work like Faw'id-al-Fu'ad given its reputation for piety and accuracy, performed a para-scriptural function, disseminating the words of the last great master, as he uttered them in his khanqah in Ghayaspur, Delhi. In the manner of speaking, Hasan Sijzi became a companion, and Faw'id-al-Fu'ad, a modern Hadith.

Faw'id-al-Fu'ad was followed by two more Chishti malfuzat that appeared within twenty years of the death of Nizam ud-Din. The first was Ahsan ul-Aqwal, a record of the sayings of Shaikh Burhan ud-Din Gharib (d. 1337) of Daulatabad, a successor of Nizam ud-Din, and his khalifa in the Deccan.(Ernst 1992) The second, Khair-al-Majalis by Hamid Qalandar, was a record of the conversations of his teacher, Nasir ud-Din Mahmud Chiragh-e- Delhi (d. 1356), another khalifa of Nizam ud-Din who had stayed back in Delhi.(Nizami 1991) It is interesting to note the cross-country traversal of the early Chishti malfuzat tradition. Burhan ud-Din Gharib had gone from Delhi to Daulatabad, where his own malfuzat would be written down by a disciple; while Hamid Qalandar, the transcriber of Nasir-al-Din Mahmud's discourses, came from Daulatabad to Delhi a few years later, with the knowledge of the composition of Ahsan ul-Aqwal behind him.



(Sama)

A second reason for the preeminence of Faw'id-al-Fu'ad is that it is still held as an exemplar of the genre of malfuzat in south Asian Persian literature, which, after its genesis in the Chishti fold, spread rapidly among the other sufi traditions of India, and continued well until the nineteenth century. Though primarily a religious text, malfuzat was from the out set a complex prose genre, negotiating between the voice of the pir and the meditating presence of the disciple-transcriber, using dialogue and proto-dramatic form to represent the utterances of the teacher, interpolating

anecdotes and inset stories, and linking local and immediate events and persons with the mainstream traditions of Islam. The original aim of malfuzat was to render utterances with minimal distortion, but in its subsequent development, the genre acquired a more liberal and literary application with the proliferation of spurious malfuzat; for it was in the invented discourses of historical saints – replete with legends and miracles – that the genre achieves its freedom from that regime of fact and verisimilitude which gave to a work like Faw'id-al-Fu'ad its original sanctity. (Rizvi 1997: 4)

While the first two reasons for the preeminence of Hasan Sijzi's work are to be found in its reception history over the centuries, the third reason is more recent and historically oriented. From the colonial period onwards, historiography of medieval India was chiefly reliant on court chronicles and other official documents; a method reminiscent of the Rankean privileging of state paper that dominated nineteenth century European history-writing. But in recent years, medievalists have shown a new willingness to expand their interest from philology and political history to social and cultural history, and to enlarge their archive sufficiently to approach religious and literary texts as historically valid documents. This new interest in "non-official" sources of medieval history has naturally found in the long and dense tradition of malfuzat a rich vein of material. While official ta'warikh, futuhat, and akhbar appeared under royal patronage or were written by men seeking the court's favour, malfuzat from its first origins appeared in another site of speech and transcription. The kahnqah of the sufi master, especially the Chishti master was a popular space, and sometimes, a site of opposition, where the concerns of the common people could be heard amidst the critique of the state and the world by the master. (Nizami 1991) In the case of Faw'id-al-Fu'ad, it was the speech of one who had renounced the world and defied sultans, faithfully written down by a disciple who too would renounce the army and the court. Where else, but in such a document, could one hope to find an honest and unmediated access to social and cultural life in medieval India.

II

Some Prospects for Reading Faw'id-al-Fu'ad

These accepted reasons for the preeminence of Faw'id-al-Fu'ad as an exemplary malfuzat give an idea of the contours of its reception history, the cultures of reading in which Nizam ud-Din's words, as mediated by

Hasan Sijzi, have circulated, and the literary canon to which it has contributed. It is noteworthy here, that despite differences of emphasis and method, there is a deep continuity between the religious, literary and the historical readings of Faw'id-al-Fu'ad. The criterion of piety and sincerity that gave canonical status to Faw'id-al-Fu'ad in religious and literary appreciation has been secularized in positivist historical scholarship as the reliability of the text as a source.

The companion, known for his fidelity, has now turned into the realist, documenting facts accurately. Faith is not only the strength of the murid; it is equally the giver of the certainty that the positivist historian demands from his source material.



If the willingness to read malfuzat literature as source material for social and cultural history has marked an important turn in medieval

historiography and philology, it is also true that much scholarship still tends to read medieval texts for “facts” at the cost of questions of style, audience, reception and patronage. (Ali 1990) As Marilyn Waldman observed at the beginning of her study of Tarikh-i-Bayhaqi.

In the field of Islamic history, where scholars have tended to historical narratives almost exclusively as unstructured, uninterpreted mines of factual information, the handling of source has been particularly problematic. The criteria of validity for facts obtained from historical narratives are largely external; rarely are they related to the internal dynamics of the work from which the facts have been taken, or to interaction of the author’s mind with the material he has presented. [...] Instead of asking what a pre modern Muslim author was trying to do as a historian and how he accomplished his goals, the scholar of Islamic history has usually been content to ask what information the source provides that can be useful in solving his own problems. (Walman 1974:3-4)

While a positivist, “fact”-based approach to a text like Faw'id-al-Fu'ad may yield rich dividends for the social historians of medieval India, there are other questions that the text raises, not useful perhaps for practical historiography, but important within any speculation about the place of Hasan Sijzi’s record within Islamic literature and Arab-Persian historical thinking. Two such questions are fairly obvious: (a) how does time appear in Faw'id-al-Fu'ad, and (b) what is the relation between Faw'id-al-Fu'ad in particular, and malfuzat in general, and cognate genres such as court chronicles, “mirrors for princes”, diary, and saintly biographies. In the remaining section of this paper, I shall examine these two questions, not exhaustively or conclusively, but in a tentative and exploratory way.

III

Form, Time and Narrative in Faw'id-al-Fu'ad

One of the most intriguing aspects of Faw'id-al-Fu'ad, and one that distinguishes it sharply from earlier and later malfuzat, is its use of the calendar to make the basic narrative unit of the majlis, instead of religious and moral topics, as in canonical text on tasawwuf. In Faw'id-al-Fu'ad, however, precise datelines distinguish one majlis from another, locating every majlis within an axis of public, historical time, and giving to each a temporal situated-ness that adds considerably to the aura of authenticity that the narrative possesses.

Yet each majlis, though it represents what one might described time of the work, the time of hearing and seeing, the time in which faith finds its

strength, and the pen, its guidance. In this axis of time the basic unit is the day or hour of the majlis, and where each majlis is discrete, autonomous, and self-authenticating. But the association of these discrete units gathered from fifteen years into the complete Faw'id-al-Fu'ad is also an unfolding of historical time, which gives a sense of the fortunes of war and peace as they effect the state and society in Delhi during the Tughlaq period, and of the author himself as a subject, and his again teacher.

How are we to read this dual treatment of time in Faw'id-al-Fu'ad? What relation may there be between Hasan Sijzi's uses of time as a narrative principle and other forms of historical writing? What are the origins of the diary-like structure of the text?

Conclusion

Though Faw'id- al- Fuad is not the First book Written in the genre of Malfuzat, there are a Number of reasons that make this book Unique and Exemplary. It is not Surprising, then, that Within 20 years after the Emergence of this book, two more important and Famous books by the name of Ahsan ul- Aqwal and Khair- al- Majalis appeared. These two books had also Written in the genre of Malfuzat.

Faw'id-al-Fuad is a Valuable and authentic Source for Modern researcher and Scholar. It is a non- official Source Different from official Tawarikh, Futuhat and the like Which were Written to win the Favour of the Court. Faw'id- al- Fuad, on the other hand, reflects the Socio- Cultural Condition of its time Neutrally Without fear or Favour. It goes Without Saying that in Such fact- based books, it is not the style, Manner of Writing and the such that are of Primary Concern for a Modern Scholar. Instead, it is the Content and Subject Matter of the books that Makes the Scholar Satisfied. Yet, it Should be noted that Faw'id- al- Fuad is a Coherent text in which the Relationship Between Relegion, History and Literary aspects of the book is Firmly Established and Maintained.

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