

**Objects of Devotion:  
Representations of Muslim Saints in Early Modern South  
Asian Painting, 1500-1700**

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May 2018

## ABSTRACT

Representations of Muslim saints in early modern South Asian painting are a unique synthesis of Persianate and Indic devotional cultures. They also offer a fascinating window into the Indianization of Islamic spirituality. Despite the ubiquity of this multifaceted genre of Indian painting, there has been no prior study in the field of art history that addresses it in depth. By focusing on devotional images made for an elite Indo-Muslim audience between circa 1500 and 1700 this dissertation aims to identify and preliminarily survey the evolution and dissemination of the genre, focusing on thematic continuities derived from Muslim devotional literature and religious thought. The research also identifies the key historical moment when images of saints began to take on a more expressly devotional significance as objects of meditation and remembrance.

Around 1640 a unique turn in imperial Mughal patronage reconfigured Muslim devotional painting. At this time, two of Emperor Shāh Jahān's children entered an Islamic mystical order of Sufism under the guidance of the well-known *shaykh*, Mullā Shāh. As the first in the Mughal imperial line to be formally initiated into Sufism, Dārā Shikoh and his elder sister Jahānārā Begum, the first lady of the empire, became central patrons of devotional painting in North India. Before the imperial siblings' entry into mysticism, images of ascetics and saints produced for a Muslim audience were used primarily for purposes of imperial self-fashioning—supporting the Mughal claim to divinely ordained kingship—and as didactic tools to transmit deeply rooted princely values shared across the Indic and Persianate worlds. After Jahānārā and Dārā's



initiations the stylistic language of the representation of saints shifted and some of the images acquired a meditative function.

My research employs an interdisciplinary methodology that combines art historical concerns with close analysis of Persian primary literature. Of central importance are passages drawn from the philosophical, autobiographical and devotional writings of Jahānārā Begum, Dārā Shikoh and Mullā Shāh.

The saint's physical form is the mirror of the Formless One. If you long to see the  
Invisible, see Him in the saint.

(Bhagat Kabīr)

\*\*\*\*\*

There is a secret within this hidden servant (of God), and if it were to be unveiled,  
Without doubt, the very face of the Lord would be revealed

(Shāh Dilrubā)

\*\*\*\*\*

از عملِ خویش ندارم امید  
بر کرمِ تست مرا اعتماد

(Dārā Shikoh)

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am immeasurably grateful to the many people who have made this dissertation possible. Over and above all is my *Ustād Ji*, Daniel Ehnbohm, whose calming presence guided the entire process, reminding me to take one step at a time without losing sight of the bigger picture. Like any good guide, Dan is a generous enabler. Not only was he enthusiastic about my unusual path to scholarship but he also put all his trust in me finding my feet in the field. I realize how great a privilege it has been to be under his wing. I will always cherish our many conversations: from politics to painting, we covered it all.

I am also deeply indebted to my other committee members at the University of Virginia: Douglas Fordham for the numerous, incisive conversations that have helped me frame my ideas and methodology; Shankar Nair for his immense patience given the countless times I dropped into his office unannounced asking for advice on everything from Persian translation to arcane questions about seventeenth-century South Asian religions; and Amanda Phillips for her thoughtful and ever-practical advice throughout the writing process.

I would also like to thank UVA colleagues from a variety of departments who generously gave their time and expertise whenever I went to them for help. These include Sheila Crane, Sarah Betzer, Dorothy Wong, Larry Goedde, Mahshad Mohit, Jane Mikkelsen, Sonam Kachru, Mehr Farooqi, Richard Cohen and Rich Barnett. From among my own student cohort, I must thank Eric Hupe, Jennifer Camp, Jinchao Zhao and Justin Greenlee.

Krista Gulbransen has been an incredible support throughout this process, adopting me like an elder, wiser academic sibling. Other scholars in the US who shared their writings and were always gracious with their time and advice include Molly Aitken, Navina Haidar, Supriya Gandhi, Debra Diamond, Dipti Khera and William Wroth.

I have been fortunate to present sections of my dissertation in conferences, symposia and workshops. Those who invited me and those with whom I had the chance to discuss my research on these occasions include Kamran Asdar Ali, Janice Leoshko, Azfar Moin, Adam Hardy, Kimberly Masteller, Humama Bushra, Isabella Nardi, Yael Rice, Kishwar Rizvi and Jinah Kim.

A number of grants have provided support for my research in the US, the UK, Europe and Pakistan. Even though the Indian government would not allow me to visit the country as a Pakistani researcher, I must thank the American Institute of Indian Studies for going out on a limb to award me a one-year junior research fellowship. A junior research fellowship from the American Institute of Pakistan Studies made it possible for me to conduct preliminary research in Europe and Pakistan. With the help of the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Theodore Rousseau travel fellowship I spent a year exploring some of the great libraries and Indian art collections in the UK and Europe. I was able to complete my dissertation writing through fellowship support from the Council of Library and Information Resources and the Smithsonian Institution's Freer-Sackler Galleries.

It was in Lahore that my research journey really began. Without the help of Sumaira Samad, former director of the Lahore Museum, who warmly opened the doors allowing me to document and study the drawing and painting collection, my project

would never have taken this direction. I must also thank Uzma Usmani, the keeper of paintings, for always making time for my untimely arrivals and requests. Others at the museum whose help was crucial for my research include Iffat Azeem, Ahtesham Chaudhary, Ghulam Ali and his security team who were always cheerfully at hand.

I am deeply indebted to Muhammad Suheyl Umar for helping me locate some important manuscripts in the collection of the Punjab University Library. I am also grateful to Hameed Akhund for paving the way for me to access the National Museum Karachi's painting and manuscript collection. Muhammad Shah Bukhari, director of the National Museum, was very kind to open the collections for my work. In Islamabad, the Iran Pakistan Institute of Persian Studies proved to be an indispensable resource for Indo-Persian manuscripts.

Back in Lahore, Fakir Syed Aijazuddin's enthusiastic company, his incredible library, the discussions over chai, samosa and cake, and the indelible tales of that great generation of art historians enlivened my research period. My brother Taimoor Khan Mumtaz and his institute of traditional studies, Hast-o-Neest, proved to be a wonderful laboratory for my raw, uncooked ideas. His honest critiques of subtle religious matters proved to be vital for sharpening my arguments. I must also thank Amir Raza Fazil from Hast-o-Neest for helping me with some of the initial Persian translations. Fakir Saifuddin from the Fakir Khana Museum was also extremely gracious with his time, especially in the earliest stages of my journey into historical research.

During my stay in London the inexhaustible hospitality of family and close friends made the trip so much more meaningful and enjoyable. In addition to thanking my uncle and aunt, Babar Mumtaz and Lalita Uttam Singh, I must also sincerely thank

Reza and Nureen Shah-Kazemi, Jonathan and Deborah Bell, Omar Rifaat, Emma Clark, Justin Majzoub, Khalid Naqib, Juan Acevedo and Judith Peña for providing us with such good company across Britain. Susana Marin shared valuable material from her own research for which I am incredibly grateful. In Dublin I was warmly hosted by my cousin, Faraz Khan, and Tim and Christine O'Neill.

In London the British Library became a second home. Without the assistance of Malini Roy, Ursula-Sims Williams and Saqib Baburi my experience would have been much less fruitful. Saqib Sahib in particular pointed me to key manuscripts that were completely new to me. At the Victoria and Albert Museum I would like to thank Susan Stronge, who supportively helped me develop my project in its early phase. Others I would like to thank include Emma Rogers and Annita Nathwani from the V&A; Richard Blurton from the British Museum; Najam Abbas from the Institute of Ismaili Studies; Christine Ramphal from Francesca Galloway Gallery; Emily Hannam from the royal collection at the Windsor Castle; Andrew Topsfield, the former keeper of Asian art at the Ashmolean, Oxford; and the staff of the Bodleian Library, Oxford, and the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. In Europe I would like to thank Elaine Wright, former curator of the Islamic Collections, and Celine Ward, reference librarian at the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin; Roselyn Hurel for her hospitality in Paris; the helpful staff of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France; Marja Stijkel from the Rijksmuseum; and Caroline Widmer from the Museum Rietberg.

In the United States I have had the great privilege of working in two world-class museums: the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Freer-Sackler. In these contexts as well as in the other excellent American collections I was able to visit, the curatorial staff



were all extremely gracious facilitators. In addition to Navina Haidar, at the Metropolitan Museum I would like to thank Sheila Canby, Maryam Ekhtiar and Abdullah Ghouhani for their assistance. At the Freer-Sackler Debra Diamond has been a wonderful cheerleader and guide. I must also acknowledge my wonderfully supportive cohort of Smithsonian fellows, which includes Holly Schaffer, Emma Stein, Shailka Mishra, Kent Cio and Kerry Roeder. Other scholars from US museums and auction houses who have contributed to my project include Sonya Quintanilla, Curator of Indian and Southeast Asian art at the Cleveland Museum; Leiko Coyle, Senior Specialist of Indian, Himalayan and Southeast Asian art at Christie's; and Laura Weinstein, Curator of South Asian and Islamic Art at the Museum of Fine Arts Boston.

None of this would have come to fruition without the enduring support of my parents, Khawar Mumtaz and Kamil Khan Mumtaz, who have quietly encouraged all of my forays, first as an artist and later as an art historian. My father in particular has been a guiding light, not just for his advice on my work, but as a spiritual and intellectual role model *par excellence*. My sister, Samiya Mumtaz, and brother-in-law Farjad Nabi, both with their incredible depth of local Punjabi culture, language, flora and fauna, have taken a keen interest in my project as it has evolved over the years. I thank my wife's parents, Dave and Kimberly Pheobus, whose home in Maryland has been a welcoming way station for so many of our adventures across the globe. Alyssa Pheobus has accompanied me on this journey all the way, helping me at every turn. She is my *upaguru*.

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 Sackler Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution (S1986.406)  
 Photograph courtesy Freer|Sackler website

**Figure 3.48**

Miyān Mīr  
 circa 1635  
 British Library (J.7.11)  
 Photograph by author

**Figure 3.49**

Prince Khurram's departure to the Deccan  
*Pādshāhnama*, attributed to 'Ābid, circa 1635  
 Royal Collection Trust, Windsor Castle (1005025, f.192b)  
 Photo courtesy Royal Collection Trust

**Figure 3.50**

Prince Khurram's departure to the Deccan (detail)  
*Pādshāhnama*, attributed to 'Ābid, circa 1635  
 Royal Collection Trust, Windsor Castle (1005025, f.192b)  
 Photo courtesy Royal Collection Trust

**Figure 3.51**

Shāh Jahān visiting Ajmer  
*Pādshāhnama*, attributed to Jālāl Qulī, circa 1656  
 Royal Collection Trust, Windsor Castle (1005025, f.205b)  
 Photo courtesy Royal Collection Trust

**Figure 3.52**

Shāh Jahān receives the elixir of life from the Prophet Khizr  
 by Bāl Chand, circa 1625-1630, St. Petersburg Album  
 Museum of the History of Religion, St. Petersburg (M-7992-VII-1r)  
 Akimushkin, *The St. Petersburg Muraqqa*, Pl. 69.

**Figure 4.1**

Mullā Shāh giving a sermon  
 circa 1646, Late Shāh Jahān Album  
 Chester Beatty Library (In 07B.39)  
 Photo courtesy Chester Beatty Library

**Figure 4.2**

Mullā Shāh giving a sermon (detail)  
 circa 1646, Late Shāh Jahān Album  
 Chester Beatty Library (In 07B.39)  
 Photo courtesy Chester Beatty Library

**Figure 4.3**

Rūmī comes riding on a mule  
 Illustration to a hagiography of Rūmī, 16<sup>th</sup> century  
 Library of the Topkapı Sarayı Museum  
 Barry, *Figurative Art in Medieval Islam*, 279.

**Figure 4.4**

Dārā Shikoh in a lesson  
 circa 1630-34, Dārā Shikoh Album  
 British Library (Add Or 3129 f.18)  
 Photograph by author

**Figure 4.5**

Dārā Shikoh in a lesson (detail)  
 circa 1630-34, Dārā Shikoh Album  
 British Library (Add Or 3129 f.18)  
 Photograph by author

**Figure 4.6**

Dārā Shikoh with dervishes  
 circa 1630-34  
 Bodleian Library (Ms. Douce Or.a.1, fol. 35a)  
 Photograph courtesy Bodleian Library website

**Figure 4.7**

Dārā Shikoh with dervishes  
 circa 1630-34  
 Bodleian Library (Ms. Douce Or.a.1, fol. 34b)  
 Photograph courtesy Bodleian Library website

**Figure 4.8**

Prince Salīm with an awry turban  
 by Ghulām, Salīm Album, circa 1600-05  
 Los Angeles County Museum of Art, (M.81.8.12)  
 Photograph courtesy LACMA website

**Figure 4.9**

Prince Salīm reciting poetry  
 circa 1610, Gulshan Album  
 Musée Guimet (OA 7154)  
 ArtStor website

**Figure 4.10**

A Qalandar sufi reciting a poem  
 circa 1630-34, Dārā Shikoh Album  
 British Library (Add Or 3129 f.48)  
 Photograph by author

**Figure 4.11**

A prince possibly Dārā Shikoh holding a narcissus  
 circa 1630-34, Dārā Shikoh Album  
 British Library (Add Or 3129 f.47v)  
 Photograph by author

**Figure 4.12**

Miyān Mīr and disciples  
 circa 1638-40  
 Walters Art Museum (W.696)  
 Photograph courtesy Walters Art Museum website

**Figure 4.13**

Miyān Mīr and disciples (detail)

circa 1638-40

Walters Art Museum (W.696)

Photograph courtesy Walters Art Museum website

**Figure 4.14**

Miyān Mīr and disciples (detail)

circa 1638-40

Walters Art Museum (W.696)

Photograph courtesy Walters Art Museum website

**Figure 4.15**

Dārā Shikoh in a lesson (detail)

circa 1630-34, Dārā Shikoh Album

British Library (Add Or 3129 f.18)

Photograph by author

**Figure 4.16**

Mullā Shāh

circa 1655

Art History Trust Loan, Freer|Sackler, Smithsonian Institution (LTS 2002.2.4)

Photograph courtesy Freer|Sackler

**Figure 4.17**

Painting commemorating Dārā Shikoh's initiation

attributed to La'lchand, circa 1640

Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution (S1986.432)

Photograph courtesy Freer|Sackler website

**Figure 4.18**

Painting commemorating Dārā Shikoh's initiation (detail)

attributed to La'lchand, circa 1640

Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution (S1986.432)

Photograph courtesy Freer|Sackler website

**Figure 4.19**

Mullā Shāh with Miyān Mīr

circa 1655-1658

Bharat Kalā Bhavan (BKB 717)

ArtStor website

**Figure 4.20**

Miyān Mīr, Mullā Shāh and Dārā Shikoh  
 ascribed to Chitarman, circa 1655-58  
 Victoria and Albert Museum (IM.250-1921)  
 Photograph by author

**Figure 4.21**

Shaykh Ḥusayn Chishtī, Khwāja Quṭb al-Dīn Bakhtiyār Kākī and disciples  
 ascribed to Bichitr  
 circa 1645, Late Shāh Jahān Album  
 San Diego Museum of Arts (1990.353)  
 Photo courtesy San Diego Museum of Arts website

**Figure 4.22**

(counter clockwise from the top-right) ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, Mu’īn al-Dīn Chishtī,  
 Quṭb al-Dīn Bakhtiyār Kākī, Bābā Farīd, Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā’, and Shāh Sharaf Bū ‘Alī  
 Qalandar  
 circa 1650 (with 18<sup>th</sup> century additions in Isfahan), *St. Petersburg Muraqqa’*  
 Academy of Sciences, Institute of Oriental Studies (MS. E-14, fol. 48r)  
 ArtStor website

**Figure 4.23**

(counter clockwise from the top-right) ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, Mu’īn al-Dīn Chishtī,  
 Quṭb al-Dīn Bakhtiyār Kākī, Bābā Farīd, Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā’, and Shāh Sharaf Bū ‘Alī  
 Qalandar  
 circa 1710  
 British Library (Add Or 4473)  
 Photograph by author

**Figure 4.24**

‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī  
 circa 1710-30  
 Victoria and Albert Museum (IM.295-1914)  
 Photograph by author

**Figure 4.25**

Mullā Shāh with Miyān Mīr  
 circa 1690-95, Suhrāb Khān Album  
 Ashmolean Museum (EA1990.1287)  
 Photograph by author

**Figure 4.26: Shrine of Mullā Shāh**

Lahore, 2016  
 Photograph by author



**Figure 4.27**

Mullā Shāh  
 circa 1639-40  
 Boston Museum of Fine Arts (14.664)  
 Photograph by author

**Figure 4.28**

Mullā Shāh (detail)  
 circa 1639-40  
 Boston Museum of Fine Arts (14.664)  
 Photograph by author

**Figure 4.29**

Nobleman gazing at the portrait of his beloved, circa 1725  
 Victoria and Albert Museum (D-1171-1903)  
 Photograph by author

**Figure 4.30**

Mullā Shāh (detail)  
 circa 1640-41, Johnson Album  
 British Library (J.60.10)  
 Photograph by author

**Figure 4.31**

Mullā Shāh (detail)  
 circa 1640-41, Johnson Album  
 British Library (J.60.10)  
 Photograph by author

**Figure 4.32**

Mullā Shāh (detail)  
 circa 1655  
 Art History Trust Loan, Freer|Sackler, Smithsonian Institution (LTS 2002.2.4)  
 Photograph courtesy Freer|Sackler

**Figure 4.33**

*Muṣannifāt-i Mullā Shāh*  
 British Library, London (MS Persian 1420, fol. 20b)  
 Photograph by author

**Figure 4.34**

Mullā Shāh with an old man, a disciple and a deer  
 circa 1655-58, Johnson Album  
 British Library (J7.6.2)  
 Photograph by author

**Figure 4.35**

Mullā Shāh with an old man, a disciple and a deer (detail)  
 circa 1655-58, Johnson Album  
 British Library (J7.6.2)  
 Photograph by author

**Figure 4.36**

Mullā Shāh with a Śaiva ascetic in Kashmir  
 circa 1650-55  
 Bharat Kalā Bhavan (BKB 695)  
 ArtStor website

**Figure 4.37**

Dārā Shikoh with a Śaiva ascetic in Kashmir  
 circa 1725  
 Boston Museum of Fine Arts (15.89)  
 Photograph by author

**Figure 4.38**

Mullā Shāh with disciples in Kashmir  
 circa 1680, Large Clive Album  
 Victoria and Albert Museum, London (IS.133.85/B-1964)  
 Photograph by author

**Figure 4.39**

Mullā Shāh  
 by Muḥammad Mūsā, 1699-1702, Kashmiri Album  
 Lahore Museum (1552)  
 Photograph by author

**Figure 4.40**

Miyān Mīr and Mullā Shāh with disciples  
 attributed to Muḥammad Mūsā, circa 1695-1705  
 Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (09.227.4)  
 Photograph by author

**Figure 4.41**

Ḥaẓrat Quṭb al-Dīn and Ḥaẓrat Sulṭān al-Mashaykh  
 by Muḥammad Mūsā, 1699-1702, Kashmiri Album  
 Lahore Museum (1555)  
 Photograph by author

**Figure 4.42:** Album preface

1699-1702, Kashmiri Album  
 Lahore Museum (1552, verso)  
 Photograph by author

**Figure C.1**

A gathering of mystics (detail)  
 circa 1650  
 Victoria and Albert Museum (IS.94-1965)  
 Photograph by author

**Figure C.2**

A gathering of mystics (detail)  
 circa 1650  
 Victoria and Albert Museum (IS.94-1965)  
 Photograph by author

**Figure C.3**

A gathering of mystics (detail)  
 circa 1650  
 Victoria and Albert Museum (IS.94-1965)  
 Photograph by author

**Figure C.4**

Spiritual intoxication  
 circa 1750, Clive Album  
 Victoria and Albert Museum (IS.133.74/A-1964)  
 Photograph by author

**Figure C.5**

A gathering of mystics (detail)  
 circa 1650  
 Victoria and Albert Museum (IS.94-1965)  
 Photograph by author

**Figure C.6**

The base of the Taj Mahal  
 Inditales.com

**Figure C.7**

Kamāl Dās  
 circa 1740  
 Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution (F.1936.14)  
 Photograph by author

**Figure C.8**

Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā'  
 Lahore drawing series of saints, circa 1780-1800  
 Lahore Museum (F-11)  
 Photograph by author

**Figure C.9**

Mu'īn al-Dīn  
 circa 1750-1800  
 Lahore Museum (1619)  
 Photograph by author

**Figure C.10**

Sarmad with his Qalandarī disciples drinking *bhang*  
 attributed to Muḥammad Mūsā, circa 1700  
 Christie's (Sale 12282, Lot 518)  
 Photograph courtesy Leiko Coyle

**Figure C.11**

Kabīr with Ravīdās, Sen, Aughur, Nāmdev, Kamāl, Matsyendranāth and Gorakhnāth  
 by Mīr Kalān Khān, circa 1740  
 Metropolitan Museum of Art (2009.318)  
 Photograph courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art website

**Figure C.12**

Guru Amar Dās  
 circa 1850  
 Museum Rietberg (Inv.-Nr. RVI 1396)  
 Photograph courtesy Museum Rietberg website

**Figure C.13**

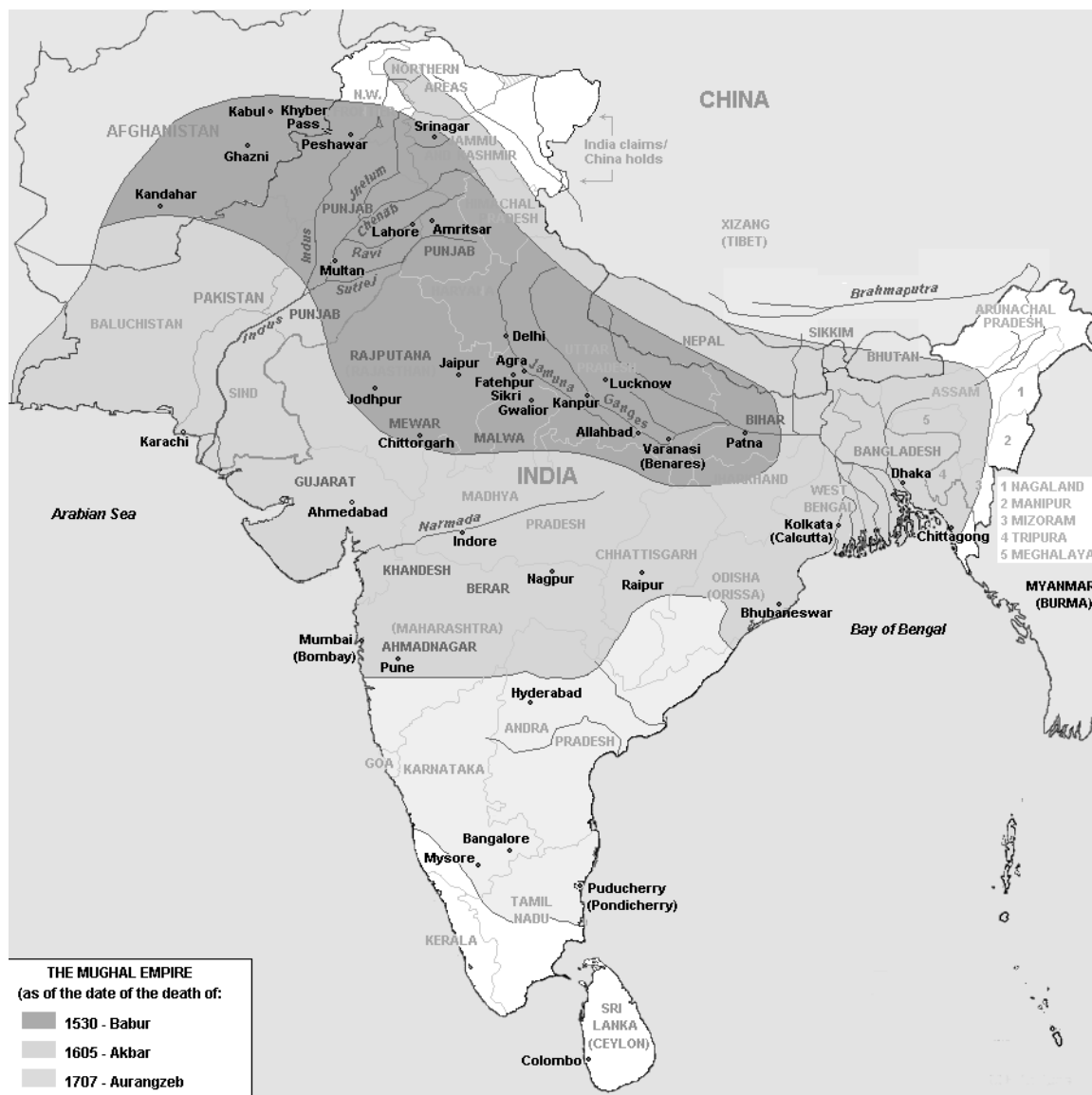
An unidentified sufi saint  
 circa 1850  
 Faqir Khana Collection, Lahore Museum (D-23)  
 Photograph courtesy Lahore Museum

**Figure C.14**

A *majlis* poster  
 circa 2000  
 Frembgen, *The Friends of God-Sufi Saints in Islam*, fig. 11

**Figure C.15**

Female ascetics in patched robes  
 circa 1750  
 Ashmolean Museum (EA1961.59)  
 Photograph by author



## INTRODUCTION

In an old part of Lahore a narrow street leads to a shrine of six women saints known together as *Bībī Pāk Dāman*, the Lady of the Chaste Mantle. According to local legend the principal saint, Bībī Ruqayyah, was the daughter of the fourth caliph of Islam, ‘Alī. She, along with her cousins, nieces and a maid fled from the battle of Karbala, in which most of the men in the line of Muḥammad were martyred. Eventually, in what was then the outskirts of Lahore, the ladies were cornered by their enemies. Just as they were about to be captured, the earth itself swallowed them, safeguarding their purity. It is said that the graves mark the very site where their sanctity was preserved. Their shrine is nestled under the shadow of an ancient gnarly *vān* tree whose roots and twisting branches embrace the entire sacred complex (**Fig. I.1**).<sup>1</sup> Echoing tree shrines across South Asia, the site is visited daily by scores of Shia, Sunni and Hindu women. Daughters and wives of wealthy politicians and landowners can be seen lighting lamps, praying and circumambulating the shrine alongside humble village women, street sweepers and house maids (**Fig. I.2**).

The congested street leading up to the shrine is packed with shops selling prayer beads, perfumes, flower garlands and food offerings, as well as contemporary *tazkira* devotional literature and posters of sufi saints (**Fig. I.3**). Images of saints can be found clustered around popular shrines across South Asia. They often show heavily Photoshopped imaginary representations of a shrine’s resident saint (**Fig. I.4**). One of the

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<sup>1</sup> “This tree is believed to have magical properties. Several female devotees yearning for a child eat its leaves in the hope that their wish will be fulfilled. Others tie prayer threads on its ancient branches, praying to the guardians of the shrine to intercede on their behalf.” See, “A Gnarled Tree in a Lahore Shrine Bears Witness to a Tradition that Puritans are Bent Upon Uprooting” (<https://scroll.in/article/853064/a-gnarled-tree-in-a-lahore-shrine-bears-witness-to-a-tradition-that-puritans-are-bent-upon-uprooting>)

most widespread poster themes is the depiction of *majālis*, or sacred gatherings, in which saints and disciples from important *ṭuruq*, or sufi orders, are shown in congregation (**Fig. C.14**). Some of the posters combine photographs and painted portraits into digitized compositions that illustrate the *silsila*, or spiritual lineage, of the resident saint (**Fig. I.5**).

I first came across these images when visiting *Bībī Pāk Dāman* a few years ago. I was immediately reminded of the historical paintings of sacred gatherings I had seen in the Lahore Museum, where I had just begun my preliminary research. These drawings and paintings were made for local patrons in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (**Fig. I.6**). I was surprised to see the underlying conceptual continuity that linked the historical artworks to the present-day popular images. Aspects of their devotional language had been transmitted despite the major disruptions religious expression has suffered in the rapidly changing cultural landscape of South Asia. At the Lahore Museum I also uncovered several undocumented series focusing on individual portraits of Muslim saints, many of whom are clearly identified by tiny inscriptions written in Persian or Devnagari (**Fig. C.8**). In this collection, images of sacred gatherings and portraits of individual saints most typically show the figures sitting on their haunches or in profile, framed against simplified graphic backgrounds.

Initially, I intended to focus my dissertation research on these eighteenth and nineteenth-century saints' portraits in order to better understand an instance in which the local artistic traditions of Punjab had persisted with a degree of autonomy despite the ruptures faced during the colonial period. However, upon further analysis I discovered that many of the artworks were based on models established much earlier in seventeenth-century Mughal India. The more I investigated the Lahore series the more I realized that

the answers to my questions about the paintings’ meanings and devotional functions could only be found in a deeper history of Indo-Muslim devotional expression. Portraits of two seventeenth-century saints in particular appeared to have had the greatest circulation in terms of the dissemination of studies and copies: namely, Miyān Mīr (d. 1635) and his successor Mullā Shāh (1585-1661) of the Qādirī order of Islamic mysticism (Compare **Fig. I.7** with **Fig. I.8**). Images of Miyān Mīr and Mullā Shāh made by artists working in the imperial workshop of Emperor Shāh Jahān became models for the way saints were represented for the next three centuries.

In my subsequent research I discovered that during the 1640s a unique confluence in imperial Mughal patronage reconfigured the already multivalent landscape of Muslim devotional painting. Three key figures emerge at the forefront of this historical narrative: Shāh Jahān’s two favorite children—the heir apparent, Dārā Shikoh (1615-1659) and his elder sister, Jahānārā Begum (1614-1681)—and the remarkable Kashmiri saint and scholar known as Mullā Shāh Badakhshī. In 1640, under the guidance of Mullā Shāh, Dārā Shikoh and Jahānārā Begum became the first in their royal line to be initiated into a sufi order. Over the course of their close association with Mullā Shāh and the Qādirī *ṭarīqa* Dārā and Jahānārā contributed to the development and dissemination of a new genre of devotional painting that would persist well into the nineteenth century.

There are many sufi portraits in eminent international collections that bear the imprecise label of “dervish” or “mullā,” generic categories that fail to acknowledge the complete identities of the subjects in question, and their relationships with larger networks of Indian devotional experience. One possible explanation for this oversight is the art historical tendency to isolate visual material from important contemporary literary



resources that contextualize artworks. By connecting portraits of known religious figures to hagiographical literature and devotional poetry, I have attempted to reconstruct a more nuanced view of these devotional images and the milieu for which they were made. I have also identified key historical moments for the crystallization of new devotional possibilities that further expanded this important genre of painting.

In addition to highlighting the unique patronage of the two royal siblings in the mid-seventeenth century, I have also investigated the larger field of devotional painting made for a specifically Indo-Muslim audience in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This has given me a deeper understanding of the various influences that contributed to the flowering of saints' portraits under Dārā Shikoh and Jahānārā Begum. One of the principle aims of the dissertation has been to identify the previously unrecognized genre of Muslim devotional painting in early modern India, highlighting its multiform manifestations. In addition to preliminarily mapping this vast and sprawling genre by focusing on key themes, I have also examined the central functions that these artworks performed for different patrons.

Owing to the scarcity of research into the subject of Islamic devotional representation in South Asia, Chapter One highlights lacunae in the field of art history. To initiate a dialogue, I survey relevant scholarship from the adjacent fields of literature, history and religious studies. The chapter concludes with an outline of my own methodology, which is necessarily interdisciplinary. In addition to considering questions of style and iconography I incorporate the voices of the subjects and patrons of the artworks, giving them the rare opportunity to speak for themselves.

In Chapter Two I discuss the conceptual framework for the representation of saints as objects of devotion. While acknowledging possible overlaps with the Hindu conception of sacred viewing known as *darśan* I have tried to explain the existence of these artworks from an intellectual perspective that is specifically Islamic. By using the devotional writings of Dārā Shikoh, Jahānārā Begum and Mullā Shāh, as well as the voices that influenced them, I have attempted to show that the foundational concept of devotional viewing, and its subsequent artistic expression in the form of saints' portraits, was in fact native to Islamic philosophical and metaphysical thought, even if the form that this artistic expression assumed was uniquely South Asian. The portraits, therefore, are a fascinating instance of a truly Indic expression of Islamic devotionism.

There has been a tendency in Islamic studies—from art history to the discipline of religion—to attribute Sufism and its resulting cultural expressions to “outside” influences. For instance, in her important study on the visual and literary sources of portraiture in Muslim painting, Priscilla Soucek cannot help but credit Hellenistic Greek thought for the flowering of portraiture under Mughal patronage, even when she can admittedly find no links between the two:

Although it is not yet possible to reconstruct all the stages by which Neoplatonic concepts and ideas from the science of physiognomy were adopted by Islamic authors to explain and justify the nature of pictorial representation in general and portraiture in particular, the Mughals inherited a cultural tradition which clearly helped to shape their own ideas about portraiture and made them favorably disposed toward its use.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Priscilla Soucek, “The Theory and Practice of Portraiture in the Persian Tradition,” *Muqarnas*, vol. 17 (2000): 106.

Within contemporary academia—particularly in non-western fields of art and architectural history that continue to be haunted by their orientalist foundations—local, self-reflexive, historical voices that present valuable insights into the functionality of artworks continue to be overlooked. By presenting passages from sufi treatises, devotional poetry and hagiographies, I have attempted to allow the Indo-Muslim voice to speak from within its own history and context while circumscribing and interpreting *itself*.

The recent work of religious studies scholar Shahab Ahmad has helped me frame my arguments. In his recent book, *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic*, he has argued for discarding the long-held binary of religion versus secularism within modern scholarship on Islam. He proposes, “an epistemological agenda where one puts aside the concept ‘religion’ when conceptualizing Islam/Islamic.”<sup>3</sup> According to him Muslims have viewed Islam more holistically, not just as “religion” strictly speaking but rather as a way of living and understanding life. Equating Islam “with some sort of restricted and *restricting* element” allows scholars to privilege the notion of “orthodoxy,” and scriptural legalism over lived experience.<sup>4</sup> *What Is Islam?* is a retort to scholarship that refuses to acknowledge what Ahmad calls the internal contradiction within Islam. A typical historiographical convention has been to analyze Islamic cultural expression in relation to Islamic law. Following that logic, scholars like Soucek arrive at the conclusion that since making human likenesses is looked down upon by legalistic interpreters, portraiture made for Muslim patrons must therefore be a syncretistic borrowing from

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3 Shahab Ahmad, *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2015), 431.

4 Shahab Ahmad, *What is Islam?* 115.

outside sources, and can never be explained from within the framework of Islamic thought. Similarly, another theme that has confounded the field is the presence of wine in Islamic culture, both as a literary topos and as an everyday lived reality. Rather than falling into the trap of pitting “orthodoxy” against “heterodoxy” Ahmad embraces the inherent contradictions of Islam. In his words, “the contradiction, the complimentary opposition, the paradox, *is Islam*.”<sup>5</sup>

Ahmad further explains that the underlying goal of Islamic philosophical and metaphysical/sufi thought—much of which has been the driving engine behind the various artistic expressions in Muslim history—has been to seek knowledge, and ultimately, union with God/Truth (*Ḥaqīqa*). Muslim philosophers, sufis and legal scholars all agree that Revelation links the divine and the human, and is the means for people to actively seek knowledge of the Truth. Ahmad proposes three means of accessing this Revelation. The scripture, which he labels as the “text” is one limited expression of Revelation that has been given to Muslims in the Arabic language. The “Pre-text” is the timeless, original message of Truth, of which the “text” is just one particular articulation. The “Con-Text” is the lived, historical engagement with it and through it, as seen in the arts, philosophy and metaphysics, and includes both “proscriptive” and “explorative” historical unfolding. “Con-Text is that whole lexicon of meanings that is the product and outcome of previous hermeneutical engagement with Revelation which are already present in the context of a given time and place *as Islam*.”<sup>6</sup>

Such a perspective that expands our understanding of Islam to embrace cultural variance and difference also discards “syncretism” as a useful means of inquiry. As

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5 Shahab Ahmad, *What is Islam?* 430.

6 Shahab Ahmad, *What is Islam?* 435.

Ahmad explains, “we are now able to move beyond the lens of ‘syncretism’ to a more capacious understanding. We have seen repeatedly that the idea that the Truth of Pre-Text exists beyond the Text has enabled Muslims routinely *to find Pre-Textual meaning in extra-Textual form.*”<sup>7</sup> It is thus that an explorative inquiry into other religious traditions—such as that made by Dārā Shikoh in his commentaries on the Upaniṣads—can be understood as a truly Islamic, and *Islamizing* pursuit for Truth.

With this conceptual framework very much in mind, in Chapter Three I demonstrate how the image of the yogi was specifically used as a metonym for the sufi in Muslim devotional literature and in paintings. This particular theme had a great impact on Dārā Shikoh’s patronage as a teenage prince. Later in this chapter I highlight other key themes within devotional painting that influenced Dārā and Jahānārā’s upbringing as connoisseurs and patrons. One is the representation of a largely misunderstood, but highly influential group of sufis known as Qalandars. By examining their presence in major illustrations and albums made for Mughal emperors I argue that this antinomian group, long considered to be peripheral, was in fact central in the formation of an Indo-Islamic culture. I also discuss the presence of specific living or legendary saints in albums and manuscripts made for emperors Akbar (r.1556-1605), Jahāngir (r.1605-1627) and Shāh Jahān (r. 1628-1658).

Chapter Four begins with a discussion of the early patronage of Dārā Shikoh and the presence of sufis in the *Dārā Shikoh Album* (1630-35). As the only Mughal royalty to be initiated into a sufi order Dārā and his sister were in the unique position of being both practitioners and patrons of Sufism. The rest of the chapter highlights the birth of a

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<sup>7</sup> Shahab Ahmad, *What is Islam?* 451.

unique theme within Indian portraiture in which images of spiritual guides were used as supports for esoteric practices of ritual visualization. Rather than immediately embarking on the potentially endless work of collecting and cataloguing a wide expanse of devotional images, I discuss the development and spread of the theme by focusing primarily on portraits made of the siblings' sufi *shaykh*, Mullā Shāh.

The dissertation ends with three appendices. The first is a focused catalogue of all the drawings and paintings I could find that contain portraits of Mullā Shāh, presented in chronological order. The second appendix includes key passages from Jahānārā Begum's autobiography, the *Risāla-i šāhibiyya* (1642). It is here that the princess discusses the meditative function of sufi portraits in intimate detail. The final appendix includes a transliteration and annotated translation of the first eighteen couplets of Mullā Shāh Badakhshī's *Mathnavī*, *Risāla-i-Shāhiyya*, a treatise held in high regard by the Mughal royalty.

When I first came across Jahānārā's description of her meditative use of portraits of Mullā Shāh I rushed to label them as "icons." However, I soon realized that not only is the term "icon" limiting, but it is also misleading. The fact is that these images do not appear to have been used as objects of worship, as Christian icons would function. Instead, they served as objects of devotion, for a number of different audiences that derived different levels of meaning from them. As illustrations to fifteenth and sixteenth-century epic romances images of yogis and sufis served to visualize deeply ingrained literary conventions of Indic devotional culture. As figures in Jahāngīr and Shah Jahan-period albums they functioned as ontological bridges between worldly kingship and heavenly authority. For Jahānārā, Dārā Shikoh and their close circle of sufi practitioners

the artworks functioned as aids to meditative visualization. Later, regional patrons in Kashmir and Mysore used them as mnemonic devices that prolonged the prestige of the saints and the lineages they represented.

Considered together, images of saints used for specifically Islamic devotional purposes are akin to a patchwork. Their many different forms are expressed across a vast spatial and temporal expanse, under an array of patrons, by a variety of artists working in distinct styles. The word for “patch” in Persian and Arabic is *ruqqa*. It is the same word used to describe a sheet of paper. The word *muraqqa*’ that is derived from it signifies both a patched cloak and a picture album, an artistic format that came into flower under the Mughals. In South Asia it is still very common to see ascetics, both Hindu and Muslim, wearing tattered, patched cloaks as a sign of their poverty and detachment from the world (**Figs. 1.3 and 3.3**). These ascetics, regularly represented in early modern picture albums made for royal patrons, wore only a single garment as a sign of their renunciate status, patching it piece by piece as the need arose. Also patched together but toward a different end, the *muraqqa*’ picture album juxtaposes images with beautifully visualized texts and embellished borders. Sometimes multiple paintings are seamlessly composed into one folio (**Fig. 3.35**). In its various physical and metaphorical manifestations the *muraqqa*’ object can, in fact, be understood as an epistemological framework that explains the inner logic of a wide range of Muslim cultural expressions. For example, the most popular literary structure in Muslim culture is the poetic form of the *ghazal*. It is typically composed of five to fifteen couplets that are thematically and emotionally autonomous, bound together only by the formal composition of their rhyme and meter. Just as in the picture album, one couplet might pine for a separated beloved,

while the next could be praising a noble patron, and yet another might be addressing God directly. In both the *muraqqa'* and the *ghazal* different registers of meaning are expressed in varying pitches of intensity. In this way the *muraqqa'* as patchwork has become a meaningful metaphorical framework for my entry into the colorful, often fragmented world of devotional portraiture in Muslim South Asia.

In the context of my dissertation, which is only a modest first step into this world, I have focused my attention primarily on the imperial Mughal ateliers. It is important to note that the artworks I am investigating had a diverse audience. Medieval illustrated sufi romances were used as vehicles of spiritual instruction in court performances and in sufi *khānqāh* lodges. The circulation of albums was far more limited by comparison. For instance, images of sufis and yogis found in Salīm/Jahāngīr-period albums would have been intended for exclusive courtly consumption. It is also clear that Dārā Shikoh's readers were "a select, mystically-inclined audience of Muslims,"<sup>8</sup> which would have included his immediate family members, high-ranking nobility and fellow sufis in the court.<sup>9</sup> In the eighteenth century it appears that local rulers, *nawābs*, and merchants attached to certain mystical orders also patronized the genre of sufi portraiture. In Chapter Four I highlight one such example from Kashmir.

However, it goes almost without saying that the artists of the ateliers constituted a hidden, secondary audience for these artworks. It is important to remember that the traditional goal of South Asian historical painting practice (*musavvarī*) is not to develop

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8 Supriya Gandhi, "Mughal Self-Fashioning, Indic Self-Realization" (PhD dissertation, Harvard University, 2011), 6.

9 In the dissertation I have not focused on the intended audience as much as identifying a genre. However, through historical evidence such as letters, inscriptions on artworks and biographies it is possible to get a sense of the small group of family members and courtiers that were part of Dārā and Jahānārā's coterie.



personal style, but instead to aspire toward pre-existing archetypes that are often expressed through idealized models. Nonetheless, we do see examples of artists developing and sharing innovative compositional ideas through the exchange of study works. Apprenticeship began with copying from older masterpieces or from the master artist's own studies. Once the models for saints' portraits were established in the Mughal ateliers, they were carefully examined, copied and reworked by generations of local artists stationed in workshops all over the Subcontinent. In the case of portraits of Mullā Shāh, Miyān Mīr and other saints, it appears that some artists traveling with their royal patrons made life drawings that were later used as models for official paintings. Other artists working in the same ateliers copied these images. The existence of this practice is confirmed by the fact that the famous painting depicting Dārā Shikoh in the circle of Miyān Mīr and his senior disciples (**Figs. 4.17 and I.9**) was made at least twice, utilizing identical compositions around the same time period.

Keeping in mind that the artists of the imperial ateliers moved fluidly between scenes of multiple interacting figures, formal group portraits and portraits of individuals, I have taken an inclusive approach to defining what constitutes "portraiture." Casting a wide net has allowed me to compare the deeper currents that connect figurative possibilities ranging from rambunctious genre scenes depicting imagined anonymous "types," to pictorial allegories, to highly specific and personalized portraits of beloved individuals.

Finally, it must be reiterated that in this remarkably diverse world of ascetics, mystics and saints images accrued significance over time. A new level of meaning did not obfuscate a previous one, but instead was layered over it, like a transparent veil. This

is very similar to the way in which a shrine such as *Bībī Pāk Dāman* functions. It is highly likely that the place in modern day Lahore where the women saints are said to be interred was once an ancient tree shrine that became an immolation ground sometime after the Vedic period, or a site for the local practice of *sati*. During the medieval period six Muslim women recognized as saints were buried in its sacred precinct, thereby superimposing two traditions. However, this place of devotion must not be seen through the flattening lens of syncretism, which tends to inadvertently underestimate the logic and significance of religious practices. Instead, I would argue that like a *muraqqa'* album, the shrine accommodates the coexistence of multiple narratives. Depending on a person's devotional subjectivity they are likely to have access to one layer more so than another. And yet the site's multivalence does not alienate anyone; in fact, its layered framework allows it to be a uniquely inclusive space. A Vaiṣṇava Hindu circumambulating the shrine at *Bībī Pāk Dāman* does not question her intrinsic faith in the saving powers of Lord Viṣṇu, nor her right to visit the shrine, even though she may be marginalized in every other dimension of her life as a minority living in Pakistan. Similarly, for a Shia visiting the site, the act of tying a prayer thread on a tree, or eating from its leaves in the hope of bearing a child, does not negate or relativize her faith in the Prophet and 'Alī. While the terms "syncretism" and "hybridity" tend to appeal to the unacknowledged biases of postmodern scholarship, they dangerously misrepresent the very real and multidimensional lived experiences of the sincere devotee.

## CHAPTER 1:

### Muslim Devotional Representation in Early Modern South Asia: Historiography, Methods and Sources

As Mughal devotional imagery developed from the mid-1500s into the eighteenth century its diverse functions accrued and coexisted. Even as new values were ascribed to images of saints, earlier narrative associations continued to be relevant to their interpretation. The case of the particularly complex, multivalent and oft-represented figure of the prophet Khizr perfectly demonstrates the way in which the meaning of devotional paintings could fluctuate or expand according to the agenda of a given patron. Originally a Qur'ānic figure with a rich history of representation in Persian literature, the evergreen prophet was also mysteriously incorporated into the local pantheon of Indic deities as a ruler of rivers and oceans.<sup>10</sup> In a jewel-like eighteenth-century coronation painting (**Fig. 1.1**) from the Bibliothèque Nationale de France,<sup>11</sup> a Mughal court artist has prolonged a Shāh Jahān-period iconographic convention (**Fig. 3.52**) in which Khizr is shown as an ontological bridge between heavenly and earthly kingship, investing emperor 'Aẓīm ush-Shāh (r. 1712) with divine authority to rule. The newly crowned emperor is depicted holding a golden key in his right hand, which is a direct reference to a Jahāngīr-period painting in which another sanctified intermediary, the Chishtī saint Mu'īn al-Dīn of Ajmer, is shown bestowing the "key of the two worlds" upon the emperor (**Fig. 3.44**). As I will discuss in greater detail in Chapter Three, I believe that this

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10 Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, "Khwaja Khadir and the Fountain of Life in the Tradition of Persian and Mughal Art," in *What is Civilisation" and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Golgonooza Press, 1989), 157-167.

11 For details of the painting see, [http://expositions.bnf.fr/inde/grand/cgm\\_049.htm](http://expositions.bnf.fr/inde/grand/cgm_049.htm)

painting was intended as a simultaneous personification of both Khizr and Mu'īn al-Dīn Chishtī, a layering of symbolism that a contemporary viewer would have easily grasped. By contrast, in another eighteenth-century painting Khizr is shown alone, independent of imperial personages or signifiers. Much like a Hindu deity, he stands atop a fish that serves as his vehicle (**Fig. 1.2**).<sup>12</sup> Repeated in many similar paintings of varying levels of patronage, this mythic trope is evidence of his fluid significance and popularity as a figure of cultic worship.

There are other individual representations of saints that are similarly charged with multivalent meanings. For example, it is unlikely that images of Mullā Shāh or Shāh Dawla (**Fig. 1.3**) functioned solely as objects of meditation if they were also included in the *Late Shāh Jahān Album*, a highly opulent staging of the most influential figures close to the emperor.<sup>13</sup> In short, just as Muslim saints were—and still are—vital catalysts of Indo-Muslim culture, performing functions ranging from spiritual guidance to political counsel, images of saints were a common theme in almost every major album and illustrated text of the greater Mughal world. As I argue in my research, their popularity among patrons of Indian painting only increased after Dārā Shikoh and his sister Jahānārā Begum contributed a new layer of meaning to the genre.

It is therefore extremely surprising that this genre of devotional painting has not, until now, been recognized as an independent category worthy of comprehensive study.

The theme has been addressed in isolated inquiries highlighting the influence of religious

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12 Roselyne, Hurel, *Miniatures & Peintures Indiennes: Collection Du Département Des Estampes Et De La Photographie De La Bibliothèque Nationale De France*. [publié À L'occasion De L'exposition Présentée Par La Bibliothèque Nationale De France (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 2010), 86, fig. 72.

13 Elaine Wright, and Susan Stronge, *Muraqqa' Muraqqa': Imperial Mughal Albums From the Chester Beatty Library*, Dublin (Alexandria, Va.: Art Services International, 2008), 397-398, cat. no. 66B; and, Linda Leach, *Mughal and Other Indian Paintings From the Chester Beatty Library* (London: Scorpion Cavendish, 1995), 442-444, fig. 3.55.

imagery on the Mughal court, or touched upon discursively in connoisseurial projects focusing on individual court artists. When saints' depictions have received attention they have most often been considered in the context of exhibition or museum catalogues, and very rarely as part of critical research.

I will begin the present chapter by examining the historiography of Muslim devotional imagery in connection with trends evident in the field of art history. Since there is very little scholarship focusing on devotional portraiture in Indian painting I have drawn references from adjacent fields that touch upon this theme, thereby building a patchwork of sources for my foundational project. I have included a brief survey of research from outside the art historical field that has embraced relevant visual material for its own arguments. I will conclude the chapter by outlining my own methodologies for examining saints' portraits in early modern India, arguing that the genre is best understood through an interdisciplinary approach. The fields of literature and religious studies are particularly important for this avenue of inquiry.

## I. Sufi Saints in Art History

*The absence of names in the history of Indian art is a great advantage to the historian of art, for he is forced to concentrate all his attention upon their work, and its reaction to life and thought as a whole, while all temptation to anecdotal criticism is removed.*

(A.K. Coomaraswamy)<sup>14</sup>

Despite Coomaraswamy's observation made almost a century ago, art historical scholarship that has touched upon Muslim devotional painting has engaged primarily

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14 Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *The Wisdom of Coomaraswamy: Great Thoughts Selected from his Writings, Letters and Speeches* (Varanasi: Indica Books, 2001), 90.

with stylistic issues in order to identify individual hands of artists. A comprehensive study of the genre has never been attempted beyond these connoisseurial forays. When representations of Muslim saints have been mentioned in relation to the Great Mughals (1556-1707)—usually discussed in the context of imperial albums and manuscripts—they have been relegated to brief references.<sup>15</sup> Paintings associated with regional courts have received even less attention. Prior to this study, the artworks have not been recognized as constituting a distinct theme in the visual landscape of South Asian art.

Curiously, even in the field of Pahari painting, where names of artists are mostly absent, art historians have built entire careers upon the pursuit of unearthing names of artists and family workshops.<sup>16</sup> Although this pursuit does fill certain lacunae,<sup>17</sup> by following Eurocentric modes of scholarship developed specifically to examine post-Renaissance Western art, such studies fail to assess indigenous artistic practices according to their own value systems. Unlike early modern and modern Western art, Indian painting is principally a field in which—as in the case of most Pahari and Rajasthani painting—the artist is either totally anonymous, or—as in the case of most Mughal painting—his authorial presence is arguably subordinate to the choices made by the patron and his coterie.<sup>18</sup> As Vincent Lefèvre suggests for the study of Indian

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15 The Great Mughals is a term used for four successive emperors, Akbar, Jahāngīr, Shāh Jahān and Aurangzeb, under whom the Mughal Empire remained one of the richest and most powerful empires in the world.

16 A high watermark in surveying the history of Indian art through master painters was the *Masters of Indian Painting* exhibition (2012) that focused on identifying individuals, schools and families from the 11th century to the 20th century. Milo Cleveland Beach, Eberhard Fischer, B. N. Goswamy, and Jorrit Britschgi, *Masters of Indian Painting* (Zurich: Artibus Asiae Publishers, 2011).

17 An important example of this methodology in Pahari painting is, B.N. Goswamy, “Pahari Painting: The Family as the Basis of Style,” *Marg* Volume 21 (1968): 17-62.

18 Gregory Minissale also agrees with this when he says, “In Mughal art the artist or craftsman’s name did not carry as much weight or value as it did in the Western art, and this is even so when the status of the artist changed for the better in the Jahangir period where the artist was still bound by social and artistic

portraiture, “its artistic, or even its aesthetic appreciation is only one of the ways it should be looked at—and sometimes this is the less important, compared to other considerations (social, economic, political, etc).”<sup>19</sup> To Lefèvre’s list I would add religious and philosophical considerations, especially when looking at images of saints. Some recent critical studies that focus more sensitively on the themes of Indian or Mughal painting have attempted to incorporate contemporaneous intellectual perspectives. Gregory Minissale’s *Images of Thought*, Molly Aitken’s *Intelligence of Tradition in Rajput Court Painting* and Kavita Singh’s *Real Birds in Imagined Gardens* each argue that artists made stylistic choices informed by larger cultural norms in order to signify hierarchies within paintings.<sup>20</sup> These studies “attempt to understand visual intelligence” through integrating parallel sources of knowledge.<sup>21</sup>

#### i. Catalogues

Western scholars began describing Mughal painting as a distinct school of Indian art during the first half of the twentieth century. Portraits depicting Muslim saints were included in the formative studies that established the field. However, early orientalist authors such as Percy Brown and Thomas Arnold mention these images only in passing, instead prioritizing subjects like the influence of Western perspective on Mughal art, or

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conventions and had, as such, no ‘independent existence’.” Gregory Minissale, *Images of Thought: Visuality in Islamic India, 1550-1750*, 2nd ed. (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2009), 4.

19 Vincent Lefèvre, *Portraiture in Early India: Between Transience and Eternity* (BRILL, 2011), 1.

20 See, Minissale, *Images of Thought*; Molly Emma Aitken, *The Intelligence of Tradition in Rajput Court Painting* (New Haven [Conn.]: Yale University Press, 2010); and Kavita Singh, *Real Birds in Imagined Gardens: Mughal Painting Between Persia and Europe* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2017).

21 Kavita Singh, *Real Birds in Imagined Gardens*, 8. “For such a study, paintings must be placed in the context of the intellectual history of their times and must be seen in conjunction with not just dynastic history and political ideology but poetry, rhetoric, philosophy, and theology – and also astronomy, astrology, music, medicine, physiognomy, and mathematics, all sciences that deal with humans’ perception of the world.”

artists' ability to naturalistically render the individual physiognomies of their patrons.<sup>22</sup> A later generation of scholars writing in the 1970s, '80s and '90s contributed a number of valuable catalogue entries that have identified the saintly subjects of specific paintings and convincingly suggested dates on stylistic grounds. Unfortunately, most of their analyses have focused on judging artistic skill according to Renaissance and post-Renaissance European benchmarks.<sup>23</sup>

Acclaimed exhibition catalogues and surveys carried out by scholars of Mughal painting have, on occasion, considered isolated examples of saints' portraits.<sup>24</sup> Most scholars have discussed these works with the goal of either identifying the hands of individual artists or elucidating the patrons' political preferences. While these studies have contributed to our understanding of these paintings, they have often neglected to interpret the subject matter itself or the meaning of artists' compositional decisions. For

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22 Discussing an exquisite, rarely published Jahāngīr-period painting of the Emperor visiting the shrine of Mu'in al-Dīn Chishtī, Percy Brown observes, "it may be contended that, although the Mughal painter showed considerable feeling for aerial perspective, his knowledge of this science in its linear aspect leaves something to be desired." See, Percy Brown, *Indian Painting Under the Mughals, A.D. 1550- A.D. 1750*, (New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1981), 135. First published in 1924.

23 For a lengthy critique of modern Eurocentric scholarship see Minissale, *Images of Thought*, introduction.

24 A valuable resource is the exhaustive Chester Beatty catalogue of Indian paintings compiled by Linda Leach, in which relevant artworks are analyzed on stylistic grounds. It includes a brief discussion of representations of Mullā Shāh. See, Linda York Leach, *Mughal and Other Indian Paintings from the Chester Beatty Library* (London: Scorpion Cavendish, 1995), 447. Another useful source is Barbara Schmitz's catalogue of the Pierpont Morgan Library, where she includes an important discussion of images of the prophet Khizr in Mughal painting and their ambivalence of meaning. She importantly situates images made in sub-imperial regional centers within a larger art historical view. See, Barbara Schmitz, et al, *Islamic and Indian Manuscripts and Paintings In the Pierpont Morgan Library* (New York: Pierpont Morgan Library, 1997), 156-157. Another important catalogue that includes entries on noteworthy images of sufi saints is, Elaine Wright and Susan Stronge, *Muraqqa' Imperial Mughal Albums From the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin* (Alexandria, Va.: Art Services International, 2008). Other scholars in the field who have cited devotional images in their surveys include Stuart Cary Welch and Robert Skelton, as well as Milo Beach, Amina Okada, John Seyller and Terrence McInerney. See for example, Stuart C. Welch, *The Art of Mughal India: Painting & Precious Objects* (New York: Asia Society, 1963), 102-103; Milo C. Beach, *The Imperial Image: Paintings for the Mughal Court* (Washington, D.C.: Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, 2012), 126-128, 162, 164; Amina Okada, *Indian Miniatures of the Mughal Court* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1992), 36.



instance, in his valuable study on identifying and ascribing artworks to the Shāh Jahān-period Kashmiri artist Jalāl Qulī, Terence McInerney focuses on one signed painting by the artist in the Ackland Museum, Chapel Hill, that presumably depicts Mullā Shāh and Dārā Shikoh in the mountains.<sup>25</sup> He takes for granted that the painting shows Mullā Shāh, without making any stylistic or iconographic case for the claim (**Fig. 1.4**).

Despite certain drawbacks, the aforementioned studies present noteworthy examples representative of a much larger body of literature that is vital for stylistically locating a diverse range of early modern saints' portraits housed in major European and American collections.<sup>26</sup>

## ii. Studies Focusing on Representations of Saints

Apart from brief references found in exhibition catalogues there are only a handful of studies that exclusively focus on representations of Muslim saints in Indian painting.

By integrating important oral and textual literary sources into an analysis of imagery, Coomaraswamy's short essay, "Khwaja Khadir and the Fountain of Life in the Tradition of Persian and Mughal Art," offers precious insight into the symbolic signifiers associated with representations of Khizr. Although it does not provide an in-depth survey

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25 Terence McInerney, "The Mughal Artist Jalal Quli, Also Entitled the 'Kashmiri Painter'," *Artibus Asiae* vol. LXXIII, No. 2 (2013): 479-501.

26 Losty and Skelton in particular have made some valuable contributions in their surveys. Robert Skelton, *Indian Miniatures from the XVth to XIXth Centuries* (Venice, 1961); Robert Skelton, "The Indian Heritage: Court Life & Arts Under Mughal Rule," *Victoria & Albert Museum*, vol. 21 (April-22 August 1982); and Jeremiah Losty, *Mughal India: Art, Culture and Empire: Manuscripts and Paintings In the British Library* (London: British Library, 2012), 124-137. Losty has made a convincing case for an early dating of the *Dārā Shikoh Album* (1630-1633), which the prince commissioned for his betrothed, Nādira Bānu Begum. The album includes several portraits of Indian ascetics central to my discussion of Dārā's patronage in Chapter Four.

of the many representations of Khizr found in Persia, Turkey and South Asia in the medieval and early modern periods, the study presents possible links between visual representations of this mysterious figure in India and descriptions found in Persian sufi literature.

In her brief essay, “Dara Shikuh's Mystical Vision of Hindu-Muslim Synthesis,” Elinor Gadon discusses the well-known mid-seventeenth-century painting from the Victoria and Albert Museum depicting a gathering of Hindu and Muslim saints (**Fig. 1.5**).<sup>27</sup> Unique in its subject matter, the large painting contains at the base of its composition a frieze depicting popular *bhaktic* ascetics including Kabīr, Nāmdev, Gorakhnāth and Jadrūp. Above the frieze is a large, imaginary composition depicting a sufi gathering (*samāʿ*). Noteworthy saints that surround the ecstatic dancing dervishes include Muʿīn al-Dīn Chishtī and Mullā Shāh. The main premise of Gadon’s study is to argue for Dārā Shikoh’s patronage of the artwork. Even though it lacks a thorough stylistic or iconographic discussion of the painting itself, the essay is significant for identifying the Indian *bhaktās*, and for convincingly proposing a date between 1650 and 1655.<sup>28</sup> The painting and Gadon’s seminal article foreshadow some of the research that I will explore in more detail in Chapter Four.

Another isolated, yet valuable study focusing exclusively on the representation of sufi saints is Almut von Gladiss’s “Ibrahim ibn Adham – Darling of the Angels.”<sup>29</sup> It

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27 Elinor W. Gadon, "Dara Shikuh's mystical vision of Hindu-Muslim synthesis," in *Facets of Indian Art*, ed. Robert Skelton, Andrew Topsfield, Susan Stronge and Rosemary Crill (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1986), 153-157.

28 In the dissertation conclusion I have argued for a slightly narrower dating for the painting.

29 Almut Gladiss, “Ibrahim Ibn Adham – Darling of the Angels,” in *Facts and Artefacts: Art in the Islamic World: Festschrift for Jens Kröger on His 65th Birthday*, ed. Jens Kröger, Annette Hagedorn, and Avinoam Shalem (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 305-312.

concentrates on eighteenth-century depictions of the popular early Muslim saint Ibrāhīm ibn Adham of Balkh (**Fig. 1.6**).<sup>30</sup> The eighth-century saint, who renounced his kingdom in present day Afghanistan to pursue the life of a wandering mystic, is regarded as the paragon of asceticism and as a perpetual admonishment to the worldly snares of kingship. A celebrated figure across religious traditions in India, he is the most widely represented saint in Indian painting. Portraits of Ibrāhīm ibn Adham are present in almost every major collection of Indian painting, yet there is only one serious survey on this theme. Ibrāhīm's case also brings to light a type of historiographical shortcoming that is unfortunately endemic in the field. When making catalogue entries scholars inevitably rehash previously cited entries that misquote English translations of Farīd ud-Dīn 'Aṭṭār's hagiographical account of the saint.<sup>31</sup> In every South Asian representation of Ibrāhīm, he is shown being visited by angels carrying trays of food. Without exception, entries link this representation to a supposed anecdote from 'Aṭṭār's popular thirteenth-century account, which in fact has no mention of angels carrying trays, or any narrative even closely resembling it. Rather than recycling earlier art historical mis-citations, Gladiss pays closer attention to the hagiographical literature around Ibrāhīm that evolved in Central Asia and India in the late medieval and early modern periods. After examining possible contemporary literary sources for the specifically Indian iconography as it developed in the seventeenth century, she concludes that the standard representation of the saint being visited by angels carrying trays of food became popular after the story was mentioned in a Turkish hagiography in the sixteenth century. Versions of the Turkish text

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30 For a discussion of images of Ibrāhīm ibn Adham see, Barbara Schmitz, *Islamic and Indian Manuscripts and Painting*, 170, pl. 41.

31 Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār, and A. J. Arberry, *Muslim Saints and Mystics: Episodes from the Tadhkirat Al-Auliya' ("Memorial of the Saints")* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 65-90.

traveled into India and were rewritten in seventeenth-century Persian compilations of biographies of saints. This 2007 study is a welcome addition to the one-page entry on representations of Ibrāhīm ibn Adham included in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* in 1909.<sup>32</sup>

A further contribution to the field, Rochelle Kessler's short study of Indo-Muslim saints' portraits, discusses Muslim holy men in relation to the much-belabored theme of Mughal royalty and political power. Without even considering the possibility that royal patronage for these paintings could be at least partly devotional—one aspect of a greater early modern expression of faith and piety—Kessler argues that the saints are presented merely as symbols for “strategies” of “promoting an image of piety.”<sup>33</sup>

In the larger context of devotional representation in Indian painting Debra Diamond's research stands out for highlighting early modern yogic representations in Rajasthan and the Deccan, culminating in the exhibition, *Yoga: The Art of Transformation*, which was organized by the Freer-Sackler Galleries.<sup>34</sup> The accompanying catalogue foregrounds interdisciplinary analyses linking art history with literature and religious studies. Included is an important essay by Carl Ernst titled “Muslim Interpreters of Yoga,” that discusses major Persian and Arabic primary literary sources on yoga, connecting them with known visual depictions.<sup>35</sup> According to Ernst, “(T)he transmission of yoga—in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and Urdu translations and

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32 H. Beveridge, “Ibrāhīm B. Adham,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (1909): 751-52.

33 Rochelle Kessler, “In the Company of the Enlightened: Portraits of Mughal Rulers and Holy Men,” in *Studies in Islamic and Later Indian Art from the Arthur M. Sackler Museum Harvard University Art Museums* (Cambridge: Harvard University Art Museums, 2002), 17-42. 28.

34 <http://www.asia.si.edu/explore/yoga/default.asp>

35 Carl Ernst, “Muslim Interpreters of Yoga,” in *Yoga: The Art of Transformation*, ed. Debra Diamond (Washington, DC: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, 2013), 59-67

through images—is an important reminder that the history of Indian religions needs to take account of a wide range of sources, including those Muslim interpreters who were so fascinated by yoga.”<sup>36</sup>

### iii. Indian Portraiture

Some important recent expository studies in the larger field of portraiture in Indian art have discussed the changing function, meaning and appreciation of portraiture over the course of Indian history. Padma Kaimal’s article, “The Problems of Portraiture in South India, circa 870-970” makes a claim for the indigeneity of early portraiture in the Subcontinent, arguing against previous scholarship that either ignored the genre altogether or considered it a Mughal-period, European-inspired innovation.<sup>37</sup> A significant study on Mughal portraiture and its influence on Rajput court painting is Krista Gulbransen’s recent dissertation project, “From the Court of Akbar to the Courts of Rajasthan: North Indian Portraiture, 1570-1630.”<sup>38</sup> Her analysis of how early Mughal visual and literary sources shed light on the function of imperial portraits is a valuable addition to the field.

### iv. Sufi Saints Considered in Light of the Political Personae of Mughal Patrons

Starting in the 1990s, taking a cue from Post-structuralist political theory, Mughal historiography began focusing on systems of state power as implemented through the

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36 Carl Ernst, “Muslim Interpreters of Yoga,” 67. The Hindu-Muslim spiritual symbiosis as seen through early modern Indian painting is a theme I intend to develop in my next project, as it desperately demands more attention.

37 Padma Kaimal, “The Problems of Portraiture in South India, circa 870-970,” *Artibus Asiae*, Vol. 59, No.1/2 (1999): 59-133. Lefèvre builds on Kaimal’s arguments in his book, *Portraiture in Early India: Between Transience and Eternity*.

38 Krista Gulbransen, “From the Court of Akbar to the Courts of Rajasthan: North Indian Portraiture, 1570-1630,” Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 2013, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global (3573524).

arts.<sup>39</sup> Ebba Koch is the most notable art and architectural historian to have examined visual culture as a projection of Mughal political ideology. Known for her study of Shāh Jahān-period architecture, including pioneering research on the Taj Mahal, she has written on Mughal painting as well. In her chapter, “The Hierarchical Principles of Shāh-Jahāni Painting,” she asserts that, expanding on systems established by Akbar and Jahāngīr, “(T)he fundamental components of miniature painting, in terms of composition and figure arrangement, as well as antithetical stylistic modes, were systematically explored to political ends, to create programmatic statements of order and hierarchy, the basic tenets of Shāh Jahān’s ideology.”<sup>40</sup> In a more recent article, “The Mughal Emperor as Solomon, Majnun, and Orpheus, or the Album as a Think Tank for Allegory,” she discusses how Jahāngīri and Shāh Jahāni allegorical narratives were constructed as calculated means to radiate certain kingly personae.<sup>41</sup> According to Koch, the persona of the ascetic or dervish was one of them. She concludes that the rulers’ religious pursuits were less devotional in intention and more geared toward a “search of suitable ideas and symbols to broaden their image as universal rulers with yet another deifying dimension.”<sup>42</sup> Kessler’s aforementioned article follows a similar politico-centric approach.

Afshan Bokhari, in her research on the architectural patronage of Jahānārā Begum, adopts Koch’s and Kessler’s methodology to demonstrate how the Mughal

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39 See for example, Muzaffar Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam in India: c. 1200 -1800* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2004), 81-114.

40 Ebba Koch, “The Hierarchical Principles of Shah-Jahani Painting,” in *King of the World: The Padshahnama: an Imperial Mughal Manuscript from the Royal Library, Windsor Castle*, contributions from Milo Beach, Ebba Koch, and W. M. Thackston (London: Azimuth Editions, 1997), 132.

41 Ebba Koch, “The Mughal Emperor as Solomon, Majnun, and Orpheus, or the Album as a Think Tank for Allegory,” *Muqarnas*, vol. 27 (2010): 277-311.

42 Koch, “Album as a Think Tank for Allegory,” 279.

princess assumed a spiritual persona to bolster her royal prestige.<sup>43</sup> In “The ‘Light’ of the Timuria: Jahan Ara Begum’s Patronage, Piety, and Poetry in 17th-century Mughal India,” Bokhari uses Jahānārā’s *Risāla-i šāhibiyya* as evidence to prove that the princess “negotiated and legitimized her official identities and re-claimed her Timurid heritage. The dual assertions enabled Jahan Ara to sustain the Timurid legacy by ‘lighting the lamp’ of the Timuria and to profess her piety as part of imperial ideology and practical politics.”<sup>44</sup> In her eagerness to assert her own claim Bokhari isolates and inflates Jahānārā’s statement regarding her lineage as a Timurid royal, rather than situating it in the context of the main theme of the *Šāhibiyya*, which is clearly devotional. Bokhari also adds words to the translation that are simply missing in the original Persian text. The section, in which Jahānārā comments on how she and her brother were the first Mughals to actively follow the initiatic path of Sufism, reads:

From the family of Amīr Timūr, Lord of Heavenly Conjunction, it is only us two brother and sister who are pursuing the path of Truth and are attached to our guide. None of our predecessors has been blessed with this joy, and none took the step on the path of God-seeking and Truth-searching. For this (good fortune), I was eternally grateful, and there was no end to my joy.<sup>45</sup>

In her translation Bokhari adds, “...no one took the step on the path to seek God or the truth *that would light the Timurid lamp eternally*” (italics are mine).<sup>46</sup> By putting these

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43 Afshan Bokhari, “Gendered ‘Landscapes’: Jahan Ara Begum’s (1614-1681) Patronage, Piety and Self-Representation in 17th C Mughal India,” PhD diss., 2009, University of Vienna, Vienna (A 092315).

44 Afshan Bokhari, “The ‘Light’ of the Timuria: Jahan Ara Begum’s Patronage, Piety, and Poetry in 17th-century Mughal India,” *Marg vol. 60, no. 1* (2008): 59.

45 Jahānārā Begum, “*Risāla-i šāhibiyya*,” ed. Aslam, Dr. Muhammad in *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan*, XVI, 4 (1979), 103-104. Translation is my own.

46 Afshan Bokhari, “The ‘Light’ of the Timuria: Jahan Ara Begum’s Patronage, Piety, and Poetry in 17th-century Mughal India,” *Marg vol. 60, no. 1* (2008): 54.

additional words in Jahānārā's mouth she strengthens her own thesis in which she claims that Jahānārā assumed a "sufi persona" solely for the sake of furthering her political ambitions. Rather than acknowledging the complex and multivalent nature of Jahānārā's negotiation with Islamic spirituality, Bokhari projects assumptions back onto history.

In contrast to Bokhari, Heike Franke, another scholar following in Koch's example, is more nuanced when discussing the patronage of Jahāngīr and Shāh Jahān. In her essay, "Emperors of Surat and Ma'ni: Jahangir and Shah Jahan as Temporal and Spiritual Rulers," Franke shows how Akbar, Jahāngīr and Shāh Jahān saw themselves as rulers of both the worlds—the earthly (*ṣūrat*) and the spiritual (*ma'ni*)<sup>47</sup>—but each projected this persona uniquely. Akbar completely assumed the role of spiritual guide for his court and subjects. Jahāngīr further refined the role as a form of state allegory, while Shāh Jahān was more subdued in manifesting this particular mystical aura.<sup>48</sup>

## II. Crossing the Disciplinary Divide

In contrast to art history, a vast body of literature dedicated to sufi saints exists in the fields of religious and cultural studies. In addition to Carl Ernst's inquiry into primary textual sources and the role of Indic intellectual history in shaping Indian Muslim culture,<sup>49</sup> other seminal works include anthologies such as Richard Eaton's *India's*

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47 Heike Franke, "Emperors of Surat and Ma ni; Jahangir and Shah Jahan as Temporal and Spiritual Rulers," *Muqarnas. An Annual on the Visual Cultures of the Islamic World* Volume 31 Volume 31 (2014): 123-149.

48 In Chapter 3 I have developed some arguments initiated by Heike in relation to the representations of sufi saints prior to Dārā Shikoh's patronage.

49 See, Carl W. Ernst, "Two Versions of a Persian Text on Yoga and Cosmology, Attributed to Shaykh Mu'in al-Dīn Chishtī," *Elixir* 2 (2006): 69–76; Carl W. Ernst, "The Limits of Universalism in Islamic Thought: the Case of Indian Religions," *The Muslim World*, vol.101, issue 1 (Jan 2011): 1-19; and, Ernst, Carl W. "The Islamization of Yoga in the Amrtakunda Translations," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Series 3, 13:2 (2003): 199–226.



*Islamic Traditions* and Barbara Metcalfe's *Islam in South Asia in Practice*.<sup>50</sup> Yet, apart from the work of a few scholars there is very little overlap between visual history and other historical disciplines.

A seminal figure in South Asian cultural studies, A.K. Coomaraswamy was the first scholar to examine Indian art through the lens of Indian religious thought. Working primarily in the field of Hindu and Buddhist cultural history in the first half of the twentieth century, his oeuvre at once offered a corrective for colonial historiographical discriminations and a window onto South Asian religious perspectives as expressed in classical religious texts and philosophies found in Vedic, *purāṇic* and *śāstra* literature. In view of Coomaraswamy's larger mission for a cultural and spiritual revitalization of India, Mughal art history figured as a small, albeit important, footnote. He considered portraiture as a unique Mughal introduction into the field of Indian painting,<sup>51</sup> and interpreted the school, with its penchant for naturalism, as the antipode of "Rajput" painting, which he understood as essentially symbolic.<sup>52</sup> Over the course of time his claims for these binaries have been challenged. Yet, no study of Indian art would be possible without acknowledging Coomaraswamy's contribution to the field in its nascent phase.

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50 Richard Eaton, *India's Islamic Traditions, 711-1750* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), and Barbara Metcalf. *Islam In South Asia In Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

51 Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *Catalogue of the Indian Collections in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Part VI: Mughal Painting* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1930), 3.

52 Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *Rajput Painting: Being an Account of the Hindu Paintings of Rajasthan and the Panjab Himalayas From the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century Described In Their Relation to Contemporary Thought with Texts and Translations* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1976), 6.

Some notable scholars in the field of Islamic culture, history and religion who have touched upon art history include Annemarie Schimmel, Simon Digby,<sup>53</sup> and more recently, Azfar Moin and Supriya Gandhi. In his recent book, *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam*, Moin includes a discussion of paintings made for Jahāngīr to show how the emperor's adoption of sacrality was in fact part of a pan-Islamic imperial custom at the turn of the Islamic millennium (**Fig. 3.46**).<sup>54</sup> For Gandhi, who has mapped the reception of Dārā Shikoh's literary output in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, images of the prince visiting sages are an important parallel to textual sources.<sup>55</sup>

### III. Critiquing the Socio-Political Discourse

Art historians and other scholars who have studied networks of interchange between sufis and Indian Muslim royalty have primarily highlighted their social and political implications. If we look at this history from a Foucauldian perspective we enter the field with certain biases that privilege the political dimension of sufi-disciple and patron-subject relationships. While I acknowledge the importance of this approach and utilize it when appropriate, it is not my sole point of entry for examining this multivalent history. Particularly when trying to understand the underlying motivations behind images of sufi saints and the literature that surrounds them, it is prudent not to impose

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53 Annemarie Schimmel, *The Empire of the Great Mughals: History, Art and Culture*, translated by Burzine K Waghmar (London: Reaktion Books, 2004); and, Simon Digby, *The Royal Asiatic Society: Its History and Treasures* (Leiden: Published for the Royal Asiatic Society by E.J. Brill, 1979).

54 Azfar Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 170-210.

55 Supriya Gandhi, "Mughal Self-Fashioning, Indic Self-Realization: Dārā Shikoh and Persian Textual Cultures in Early Modern South Asia," PhD diss., Harvard University, 2011, PROQUESTMS ProQuest Dissertations & Theses (3491903).

postmodern analyses that reject or ignore the very hierarchical systems that the subjects of my study participated in. Even when political motivations, such as projecting personae of piety and sanctity, are clearly evident, the multivalent meaning of artworks must be acknowledged. Post-structural theories are ill equipped to shed light on the traditional value systems that made these artworks possible. Critiquing the overemphasis on power politics in recent scholarship, Gregory Minissale adds, “(t)he role of Shah Jahan as controller of the compositional structures of Shah Jahan period painting is overstated in order to prove that a pictorial political program is reflected in one kind of interpretation of the compositions of the *Padshah-nama* when, in fact, many other more complex organizing principles may be detected.”<sup>56</sup>

Roland Barthes, in famously criticizing nineteenth-century humanist narrators of earlier histories—whom he saw masquerading as “objective” interpreters—makes the claim that the narrator and audience are in fact always implicated in altering the text, thereby engendering intertextuality.<sup>57</sup> Between the “original” object and the receiving audience there are no absolutes, since reception alters the function of the object across space and time. In the case of the visual arts, the dialogue would then unfold between the subject of the artwork and its reception by both the patrons and the contemporary audience. While this system of analysis can be applied to a specific Western-centric modern/postmodern context, it founders when imposed on South Asian devotional culture. If we were to follow the paradigm of Barthes, Deleuze and others, limiting sufi portraits to a horizontal, rhizomatic dialogue and viewing artworks as non-hierarchical

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<sup>56</sup> Gregory Minissale, *Images of Thought: Visuality in Islamic India, 1550-1750* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2009), 76.

<sup>57</sup> Roland Barthes, Richard Miller, Richard Howard, and Honoré de Balzac, *S/Z* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974).

nodes of interaction between shifting intentionalities,<sup>58</sup> then only three main actors would appear on the stage: 1, the saint as subject of the artwork, being received by; 2, the patron whose subjective appropriations alter the value and function of the object; and 3, the present-day audience/art historian who is already viewing the artwork with his or her own set of scholarly biases. Within these narrow parameters subjective interactions and power dynamics are the main detectable outcomes. However, Bruce Lawrence, in his brilliant introduction to the translation of a fourteenth-century sufi text, reminds us that there is another, far more essential relationship that is completely overlooked and regularly undermined by current scholarship.<sup>59</sup> In his words,

There is, first, the saint whose experience with God is beyond words; it is ineffable. That unbridgeable chasm of silence supersedes all the words that hint at what remains a zone of privilege shared only by the saint and God.<sup>60</sup>

While we, as twenty-first-century observers, might not partake in the historical hierarchy in which the saint communicating as interlocutor between humanity and God has primacy over all other dialogues, we must acknowledge its value for the society in question. Wayne Begley, in his influential essay on the Taj Mahal uses this prism to shed

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58 For a recent example of this methodology applied to South Asian art history see, Natasha Eaton, *Mimesis across Empires: Artworks and Networks in India, 1765–1860* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

59 In his introduction to the translation of Nizām ad-Dīn Awliyā's *Morals for the Heart*, Bruce Lawrence brilliantly exposes the deficiency of scholarship influenced by Post-structuralism when dealing with devotionism in South Asia. Although focusing primarily on the field of narrotology, his critique of postmodern discourse, and the alternative that he proposes, can easily be transposed onto the field of visual art. See, Nizāmuddīn Auliyā, Bruce B. Lawrence, and Ḥasan Dihlavī, *Nizam Ad-Din Awliya: Morals for the Heart: Conversations of Shaykh Nizam Ad-Din Awliya Recorded by Amir Hasan Sijzi* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 64-66.

60 Bruce Lawrence, *Morals for the Heart*, 65.

light on a hitherto unknown aspect of the mausoleum.<sup>61</sup> By looking at the Qur'ānic inscriptions on the building and linking them with religious discourses as transmitted through living spiritual authorities in Shāh Jahān's court Begley unravels the conceptual program of the Taj. He explains that "the Koranic passages were meant to be read and construed together; and that they constitute in effect a thematically unified inscriptional program," that "clearly establishes the eschatological themes" based on the ontological hierarchy detailed by Ibn al-ʿArabī and his followers.<sup>62</sup> What becomes apparent is that, in addition to being the mausoleum for Shāh Jahān's beloved wife, the entire complex is conceived as a mirror for the throne of God on the Day of Judgment. Begley's methodology is important not only for its consideration of the prevailing symbolic worldview of the time, but also for his use of inscriptional and other textual evidence.

Cynthia Robinson, another interdisciplinary architectural historian focusing on Moorish Spain, uses a similar scheme in her article, "Seeing Paradise: Metaphor and Vision in Taifa Palace Architecture," to discover the function of a specific eleventh-century palace in Zaragoza.<sup>63</sup> While her interpretations of poetical inscriptions are perhaps literalistic, her historical-contextual approach attempts to situate courtly arts within prevailing cultural norms.

In the field of South Asian religious studies, Shankar Nair makes a case for analyzing translations of Sanskrit texts undertaken under Mughal patronage from the specific worldview of the Islamic intellectual discourse prevalent in seventeenth-century

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61 Wayne E. Begley, "The Myth of the Taj Mahal and a New Theory of Its Symbolic Meaning," *The Art Bulletin* 61, no. 1 (2014): 7-37.

62 Begley, "The Myth of the Taj," 13.

63 Cynthia Robinson, "Seeing Paradise: Metaphor and Vision in Taifa Palace Architecture," *Gesta*, Vol. 36, No. 2 Visual Culture of Medieval Iberia (1997): 145-155.

North India.<sup>64</sup> In criticizing recent textualists he says, “What such analyses lack, however, is a sustained consideration of how the Islamic—and, in particular, Sufi—worldview(s) of the nobles in question shaped the inner workings of, and motivations behind, the movement.”<sup>65</sup> Rather than prescribing “unorthodox” motivations for, what is labeled as, Hindu-Muslim “syncretism,” he searches for the inspirations derived from within the very sufi traditions that the translators and patrons were in dialogue with. “(A) majority of the Mughal translations, and those connected with Dara Shikuh most prominently, were deeply inflected with the concepts, terminology, and ontology of the particular strand of speculative Sufism that developed in the Persian sufi poetic tradition tracing back to ibn al-‘Arabi. This strand, typically labeled ‘wahdat al-wujud,’ was quite dominant in Mughal South Asia at this time.”<sup>66</sup> Taking a cue from this methodology, in Chapter Two I will cite relevant voices from the seventeenth-century Muslim intellectual discourse in North India to argue that the devotional representation of saints in fact drew many of its conceptual premises from within the framework of Islam.

#### **IV. Methodological Approaches for the Dissertation**

In my current research I have emphasized the underlying function of saints’ portraits and the values of the patrons that made these paintings possible, rather than narrowly focusing on indexing artists’ names and engaging in debates over attribution. Recognizing certain limitations that exist in mainstream art historical inquiry, my research aims to connect Muslim devotional portraiture to a larger sphere of cultural

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64 Shankar Nair, “Sufism as Medium and Method of Translation: Mughal Translations of Hindu Texts Reconsidered,” *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses*, 43 (2014): 390-410.

65 Shankar Nair, “Sufism as Medium and Method of Translation,” 390.

66 Shankar Nair, “Sufism as Medium and Method of Translation,” 404.

history. By analyzing relevant devotional literature contemporaneous with the paintings my dissertation traces multiple sources through which the Indian sufi milieu circumscribes itself. For as Kavita Singh reminds us, “Were we to open our minds to the literary culture from within which these paintings were read, we might change the way we behold them.”<sup>67</sup>

### i. Persian Primary Sources

The function and meaning of the genre of sufi portraiture can be best understood through the contemporary, local voice. My research has uncovered the surprising interrelation of visual and textual evidence concerning sufi devotionism. Moving beyond artistic attribution this project recovers a more varied set of agents who contributed to the worship, representation and prolongation of sufi saints.

A central source for my study is the *tazkira*; the popular Muslim genre of hagiographic literature that provides a window into lived mysticism and confirms the conceptual foundation for the devotional visualization of saints. Since a comprehensive study of this literature would lead me too far off course from my current survey, I have instead employed a thin, directly relevant slice of this vast and mostly unexamined field. The best sources consist of primary Persian texts from medieval and early modern India that were circulated among sufi brotherhoods as educational aids as well as among the nobility that had ties with sufi orders and their leaders. In addition to devotional literature, I also employ court histories and chronicles that are not only important for setting the historical stage but also for highlighting the prominence of saints recorded in

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<sup>67</sup> Kavita Singh, *Real Birds in Imagined Gardens*, 40.

these accounts. Some sources relevant to my project have been translated into Urdu or English, while most remain untranslated. I have referred to translations wherever possible, but have otherwise consulted Persian originals. I have also used some important secondary literature pertaining to the history of Sufism in the Subcontinent.

Dārā Shikoh, Jahānārā Begum and their spiritual guide Mullā Shāh were all prolific authors of hagiographies, memoirs, religious treatises and devotional poetry in Persian. Mullā Shāh, the central subject for this research, was the focus of at least three contemporary hagiographies, two of which were written by the royal siblings. Dārā Shikoh included Mullā Shāh's biography in *Sakīnat al-awliyā'*, which begins with an account of the Mullā's *shaykh*, Miyān Mīr. Jahānārā begins her memoir, *Risāla-i ṣāhibiyya*, with yet another detailed biography of her guide. The third account, *Nuskha-i aḥvāl-i shāhī*, was composed in 1667 by Tavakkul Beg, a senior disciple of the Mullā who was also a member of the imperial Mughal retinue, acting as an intermediary between the royal court and the sufi *darbār* (court).<sup>68</sup> An intensely prolific author, Mullā Shāh himself compiled anthologies of his own religious commentaries as well as a *Dīvān* of devotional poetry. I have managed to locate two large anthologies in the British Library, *Mathnavīyāt-i Mullā Shāh* and *Muṣannifāt-i Mullā Shāh*, both of which include the author's own signature and marginal notes (**Figs. 1.7 and 1.8**).<sup>69</sup> There is also a copy of the Mullā's *Dīvān* in the Punjab Library, Lahore.<sup>70</sup> Jahānārā Begum has quoted

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68 Tavakkul Beg, *Nuskha-i aḥvāl-i shāhī*, MS British Library, Or 3203

69 Mullā Shāh, *Mathnawīyat-i Mulla Shah*, MS British Library, IO Islamic 578; Mulla Shah, *Muṣannifāt-i Mulla Shah*, MS British Library, Delhi Persian 1420.

70 Mullā Shāh, *Rubā'iyāt-i Mullā Shāh*, Lahore, Punjab University Library, Ms. No. APi VI, 59. Two collections of the Mullā's verses that I haven't been able to consult are, Mullā Shāh, *Dīvān*, Aligarh, Maulana Azad Library, MS 'Abd al-Salam 852/89, and Mullā Shāh, *Kulliyāt-i Mullā Shāh*, Patna, Khuda Bakhsh Library, MS HL 686.



copiously from the *Dīvān* in her *Ṣāhibiyya*, where she carefully inserts Mullā Shāh's self-referential voice to establish the divinely ordained iconicity of the saint himself.

Completed on the 30<sup>th</sup> of December 1642 (27<sup>th</sup> of Ramaḡān, 1051 AH),<sup>71</sup> the *Ṣāhibiyya* is central to my research, providing clear historical evidence for the use of sufi portraits as objects of devotion. Jahānārā's detailed accounts of her search for a spiritual master and her eventual initiation in Kashmir are key historical sources for Chapter Four. I have consulted Muhammad Aslam's edited version published in the *Journal of the Research Society in Pakistan*.<sup>72</sup> In the following year he made an excellent Urdu translation of the *Ṣāhibiyya* to which I have also referred.<sup>73</sup>

Additionally, I have consulted Jahānārā's biography of Chishtī saints, *Mū'nis al-arvāh*, which shows the great influence of Chishtī metaphysics on Jahānārā's own spiritual formation (**Fig. 1.9**). She completed the biography in 1639, at a time when she was still desperately seeking a Chishtī sufi to guide her on the spiritual path. In 1643 she added an epilogue in which she praised her own guide Mullā Shāh, and described her one-month visit to the shrine of Mu'īn al-Dīn Chishtī in Ajmer. The adulation that she showered upon the shrine offers us a glimpse of her attitude toward sufism, both as patron and devotee. I have used the Bodleian Library manuscript that includes the

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71 In the Islamic calendar, 27<sup>th</sup> Ramaḡān is considered to one of the most auspicious nights of the year. Known as the "night of power," it is thought to be the night when the Qur'ān first descended onto earth. On this evening many Muslims busy themselves in nightly vigils. It is thus no coincidence that Jahānārā and Dārā chose this sacred date to conclude almost all of their writings.

72 Jahanara Begum, "Risāla-i ṣāhibiyya", ed. Aslam, Dr. Muhammad in *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan*, vol. XVI, no. 4 (1979): 77-110. "It was first discovered by the renowned scholar Professor Muhammad Ibrahim Dar in the Apa Rao Bholā Nath Library, Ahmadabad. He wrote a scholarly article on this tract which was published in the Oriental College Magazine in 1937. Since then none of the orientalist has paid much attention to this unique manuscript." Aslam, "Risāla-i ṣāhibiyya", 77.

73 Jahānārā Begum, "Risāla-i ṣāhibiyya", translated into Urdu by Dr. Muhammad Aslam in *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan*, vol. XVII (1980): 69-107.

epilogue,<sup>74</sup> and have also referred to Maulvī Muḥammad ‘Abd al- Ṣamad Qādirī’s Urdu translation titled *Mu’īn al-arvāh*.<sup>75</sup>

Dārā Shikoh was an even more prolific author than Jahānārā. Apart from his two collections of biographies of saints, *Safīnat al-awliyā’* (1639) and the already mentioned *Sakīnat al-awliyā’* (1642),<sup>76</sup> the other major source for my project is his *Ḥasanāt al-‘ārīfīn*.<sup>77</sup> Completed in 1652, this volume is a fascinating retort addressed to “the dastardly, the low-minded, the bland ones of dry piety who, owing to their short-sightedness, are always quick to hurl a hundred castigations and accusations of heresy.”<sup>78</sup> The growing dissent among some elite religious scholars against Dārā for his increasingly strong views on the unity of religions prompted him to compile the *Ḥasanāt al-‘ārīfīn*, a collection of ecstatic utterances gathered from Qur’ānic verses, *Ḥadīth* literature and the exclamations of Muslim and Hindu ascetics, whom Dārā describes as “Unitarians” and “Gnostics” (*muvaḥhid* and *‘ārīf*). As Supriya Gandhi points out, this book acts as a bridge between Dārā’s previously sufi-centric outlook and his growing love for monist Hinduism.<sup>79</sup> The treatise has proven central for my research in two distinct ways. First, it has provided the conceptual and literary underpinning for the representation of sufi saints from within the Indo-Sufi tradition as explained by the most recognized patron of the artworks himself. I have therefore constructed Chapter Two around the *Ḥasanāt al-*

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74 Jahānārā Begum, *Mu’nis al-arvāh*, MS. Bodleian Library, MS.Fraser.229.

75 Jahānārā Begum, *Mu’nis al-arvāh*, translated into Urdu by Maulvi Muhammad Abd-ul-Samad Qadri as *Mu’īn-ul-Arvah* (New Delhi: Rizvi Publications, 1891).

76 Dārā Shikoh, *Sakīnatul Auwliyā* (Lahore: Al-Faisal Nashran, 2005).

77 Dārā Shikoh, *Ḥasanāt al-‘ārīfīn*, ed. Makhdum Rahin (Tehrān: Mu’assasah-i Taḥqīqāt va Intishārāt-i Vīsmān, 1352/1973).

78 Dārā Shikoh, *Ḥasanāt al-‘ārīfīn*, 2.

79 Supriya Gandhi, “The Prince and the *Muvaḥhid*: Dārā Shikoh and Mughal Engagements with Vedānta”, in *Religious Interactions in Mughal India*, ed. Vasudha Dalmia and Munis Faruqi (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), 71.

‘*ārifīn*. Secondly, because the prince has included biographies and utterances of sixteenth and seventeenth-century ascetics who were important to him, some of whom also make their way into paintings, it has helped me identify subjects of significant artworks that had been hitherto clouded in mystery.

As a supplement to the *Ḥasanāt al-‘ārifīn*, I have also consulted Dārā Shikoh’s *Risāla-i ḥaqqnumā* (1647) which is a short treatise on the meditative practices of Miyaṅ Mīr and Mullā Shāh’s particular branch of the Qādirī order.<sup>80</sup> The first chapter deals with the method of visualizing the image of the saint in the heart, and serves as an invaluable source for understanding the conceptual premises for representing saints in a devotional manner.<sup>81</sup> Significantly, it enlists this practice as the first step towards the ultimate union with God. If portraits commissioned by Jahānārā Begum and Dārā Shikoh had, as one of their primary functions, the aim of aiding the disciple in visualizing the guide, it is possible that certain images would have been made when the siblings were still novices on the gnostic path. I have incorporated the *Risāla-i ḥaqqnumā* into a larger discussion of the patrons’ intentions in Chapters Two and Four.

Mullā Shāh’s two treatises at the British Library are foundational for understanding the larger Indo-Sufi zeitgeist that helped shape Dārā Shikoh’s spiritual outlook in the 1640s. Written in poetic form with occasional commentaries in prose, these treatises place Mullā Shāh in the chain of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s *Waḥdat-al-wujūd* (Unity of Being) philosophy, also known as *Akbarian* metaphysics, as expressed in a

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80 Dārā Shikoh, *Risāla-i ḥaqqnumā*, Lucknow: Munshi Nuval Kishur, 1896. For an Urdu translation see, Dara Shikoh, *Risāla-i ḥaqqnumā, ya’ni, Rah-e-Huda*, transl. Maulvi Ahmad Ali (Lahore: Manzil Naqshbandiyyah, Kashmiri Bazaar), 2000.

81 Dārā Shikoh, *Risāla-i ḥaqqnumā*, 6-7.

seventeenth-century North Indian context.<sup>82</sup> As explained in greater length in Chapter Two, Mullā Shāh's oeuvre consists of diverse and lengthy commentaries on the paradoxical presence of the absolute (*Ḥaqq*) in the relativity of creation. This emphasis on the immanence of God, or seeing God everywhere, clearly inspired Dārā Shikoh's *Ḥasanāt al-ʿarīfīn*, in which this paradox is described at length through the voices of scripture and the saints. In Chapter Two I will argue that it is precisely Dārā Shikoh and Jahānārā's adherence to *Waḥdat-al-wujūd* tinged with indigenous devotional culture that facilitated the conceptual development of their contributions to the genre of devotional painting. Furthermore, there is ample evidence that the *Akbarian* emphasis on seeing the presence of God everywhere made it possible for its adherents in South Asia to participate in Indic devotional practices.

Another source of insight into lived spirituality in seventeenth-century India is the anonymously written *Dabistān-i mazāhib* (circa 1653),<sup>83</sup> which includes anecdotes from the lives of Jahānārā, Dārā Shikoh and Mullā Shāh, as well as other important ascetics such as the Jewish-born mystic Sarmad, whom Dārā looked to as one of his guides.<sup>84</sup>

For historical records I have mostly relied on imperial accounts from Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ Kambūh's *Amal-i ṣāliḥ: Shāh Jahān-nāma* (1659-60),<sup>85</sup> and Lāhawī's *Pādshāh-*

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82 For a detailed exposition on Ibn al-ʿArabi's metaphysics see, William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-ʿArabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989).

83 Muḥsin Fānī, and Raḥīm Rizāzādah-'i Malik, *Dabistān-i mazāhib* (Tih-rān: Kitābkhanah-'i Ṭahuri, 1983).

84 For an insightful study into the history, authorship and reception of the book see, M. Athar Ali, "Pursuing an Elusive Seeker of Universal Truth: the Identity and Environment of the Author of the *Dabistān-i-Mazāhib*," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, v.9, n.03 (1999): 365-373.

85 Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ Kanbūh, *ʿAmal-i Ṣāliḥ Al-Mawsūm Bih Shāhjahānnāmah*, vol.i-iii (Lahore: Majlis-i Taraqqī Adab, 1967).

*nāma* (1627-1648)<sup>86</sup>, as well as the colonial period historical tome of Khafi Khan, titled *Muntakhib al-Lubāb* (1869).<sup>87</sup>

An essential secondary resource for Indian sufism is Athar Abbas Rizvi's two-volume *A History of Sufism in India*.<sup>88</sup> Rizvi has meticulously scoured invaluable Persian hagiographical, biographical and historical Indo-Muslim literature to construct an exhaustive survey of sufi brotherhoods (*ṭarīqa/pl. ṭuruq*), starting from their arrival in the Subcontinent in the medieval period to their flowering and persistence into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Not only does he discuss subtle ideological and intellectual differences between various *ṭuruq*, he also offers brief biographies of some of the major sufis of India.

Other helpful historical references are B.J. Hasrat's *Dārā Shikūh: Life and Works*,<sup>89</sup> and Fatima Zehra Bilgrami's *History of the Qadiri Order in India*. Additionally, Supriya Gandhi's dissertation on Dārā Shikoh, "Mughal Self-Fashioning, Indic Self-Realization: Dārā Shikoh and Persian Textual Cultures in Early Modern South Asia," has helped me better understand the development of Dārā Shikoh's spiritual interests as reflected in his literary output. In turn, this has allowed me to situate the prince's patronage of sufi portraits within the larger sphere of his intellectual development.

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86 Lāhawī, 'Abd Al-Hamīd, and H A Qureshi. *Lahori's Padshahnamah: 1592-1648, vols. I&II* (Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Delli, 2010).

87 Khafi Khan, *Muntakhib Al-Lubab* (Calcutta: College Press, 1869).

88 Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, vol. i-ii (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1978).

89 B.J. Hasrat, *Dārā Shikūh: Life and Works* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1982).

## V. Conclusion

Unlike other historical fields in Islamic studies where the study of Sufism is a central concern, art history has largely ignored sufi thought and the visualization of sacrality in Muslim South Asia. Furthermore, instances of South Asian art historical scholarship seriously engaging with indigenous intellectual history and its literary expressions are few and far between. Also problematic, interdisciplinary scholarship outside of the field of art history almost always fails to place visual material on an equal footing with textual sources. Recovering a local South Asian perspective on Sufism compels the scholar to integrate cultural practices and other forms of evidence that have been lost to modern scholarship because of the weight of disciplinarity. Recognizing that fragments of this history are scattered across specializations, my project attempts to stitch them back together into a historically viable reconstruction of sufi practices, as well as their representations in and interactions with painting.

Partaking in the aura of sanctity through a range of representational modes was clearly central to Muslim devotionism. With this in mind, the next chapter will examine examples from the writings of Mullā Shāh, Dārā Shikoh, Jahānārā Begum and their contemporaries to uncover the conceptual motivations that expanded the role of saints in the visual landscape of Indian devotional representation.

## CHAPTER 2:

### Conceptual and Literary Premises for the Representation of Saints as Objects of Devotion

*Anyone who gazed, with honest devotion, upon the face of [Mullā] Shāh  
Wheresoever he looked, he saw the face of God<sup>90</sup>*

(Mullā Shāh)

*There is a secret within this hidden servant (of God), and if it were to be unveiled,  
Without doubt, the very face of the Lord would be revealed<sup>91</sup>*

(Shāh Dilrubā)

### Introduction

Explaining the various yogic manifestations in India, Debra Diamond has pointed out that yoga is “not a unified construct or the domain of any single religion, but rather decentralized and plural.”<sup>92</sup> This observation resonates with other aspects of spirituality in the Subcontinent. What Diamond has described as “trans-sectarian sharing”—where different South Asian religious expressions borrow from each other—is equally true for the uniquely Indian concept of the act of “religious ‘seeing,’ or the visual perception of the sacred” (**Fig. 2.1**).<sup>93</sup> In the Indic world this act is known as *darśan*, while in the Persianate context it is known as *naẓar* or *dīdār*.<sup>94</sup>

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90 Jahānārā Begum, *Risāla-i ṣāhibiyya*, 88.

91 Dārā Shikoh, *Ḥasanāt*, 74.

92 Debra Diamond, “Yoga: The Art of Transformation,” in *Yoga: the Art of Transformation* (Smithsonian Institute, 2013), 24.

93 Diana Eck, *Darśan: Seeing the Divine Image in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 3.

94 The infinitive verb is *dīdan*. The word *naẓar* is originally from the Arabic. It is worth pointing out that there are equivalents in the rest of the Islamic world as well. However, the relationship with “realistic” portraiture allows me to argue for the unique South Asian expression that is exceptional.

Whereas sacred Islamic art forms such as mosque architecture and Qur'ānic calligraphy have little motivation for figural representations of divinity, arts of the book have historically sanctioned such representations as supports for devotional literature. Some early well-known examples come from fourteenth to sixteenth-century Ilkhanid and Timurid Iran and Central Asia (**Figs. 2.2 and 2.3**).<sup>95</sup> By the time Persianate tropes of painting influenced South Asian art, Islamic religious expression was already engaged in a centuries-old dialogue of exchange with local traditions. Under the Mughal rulers, who consciously allowed their Central Asian and Persianate roots to coalesce with South Asian systems of knowledge, devotion and aesthetics, arts of the book no longer privileged the word alone. For instance, in the Subcontinent single portraits made on loose folios were collected into the bound album format known as the *muraqqa'*. During the mid-sixteenth century the art of portraiture gained courtly significance and within a century had grown into a highly sophisticated art form. At the height of Mughal rule in the mid-seventeenth century a key aspect of Muslim spirituality—devotion and piety to the saint—found an ideal aesthetic language through Indic concepts of devotional viewing. Initially, Mughal rulers effectively appropriated the function of *darśan* for imperial self-styling. Starting with Akbar, it became common practice for emperors to present themselves almost ritualistically on the palace balcony, known as the *darśani jharokā*, for public viewing (**Fig. 2.4**).<sup>96</sup> The Mughal polity positioned the emperor as the seat of divine splendor, *farr*, a concept taken directly from both Indic and Persianate

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95 For key examples see, Basil Gray, *Persian Painting* (New York: Rizzoli, 1977).

96 "One of the customs of the Mughals adopted from their Hindu subjects was *darshan*, the king's appearance to his subjects at the special palace window known as *jharoka*." See, Barbara Schmitz, *Islamic and Indian Manuscripts and Paintings In the Pierpont Morgan Library*, 165-166.



ideas of sanctity, in which the avatar or saint is the locus of otherworldly presence. In the *Āīn-i Akbarī*, Akbar's court historian Abu'l Faḡl explicitly explains the use of *darśan*:

His Majesty generally receives twice in the course of twenty-four hours, when people of all classes can satisfy their eyes and hearts with the light of his countenance. First, after performing his morning devotions, he is visible, from outside the awning, to people of all ranks, whether they be given to worldly pursuits, or to a life of solitary contemplation, without any molestation from the mace-bearers. This mode of showing himself is called, in the language of the country, *darśan*; and it frequently happens that business is transacted at this time.<sup>97</sup>

As we shall see in Chapter Three, by the time of Shāh Jahān's artistic patronage this preeminent status awarded to the emperor was shifted back to the saints.

The present chapter discusses important primary literary sources that explicate the conceptual framework for the representation of Muslim saints as objects of devotion. The themes of mutual viewing and the transforming gaze of the spiritual guide are so ubiquitous in Persian literature that they hardly need an introduction. A thorough survey of this theme as expressed in the Subcontinent alone would fill volumes. For my project I am using a thin slice of relevant examples to show how the act of *nazar* was deeply established in seventeenth-century Muslim literary life. Since one of the main objectives of my dissertation is to examine the genre under the patronage of the heir apparent, Prince Dārā Shikoh, and his sister, the "first lady" of the empire, Princess Jahānārā Begum, I navigate this discussion through their voices and the voices that directly influenced them.

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<sup>97</sup> Abu'l Faḡl, *Āīn-i Akbarī*, 165. For a lengthier discussion on Akbar's use of *darśan* see, Krista Gulbransen, "From the Court of Akbar to the Courts of Rajasthan: North Indian Portraiture, 1570-1630" (Ph.D. diss., 2013), 196-198.

During the 1640s, a major literary influence on the spiritual lives of the siblings was the verse and prose of the contemporary saint Mullā Shāh. Both Dārā Shikoh and Jahānārā Begum's writings are replete with references to the Mullā's literary work. Mullā Shāh's own metaphysical language was formed in Ibn al-ʿArabī's *Akbarian* philosophical mold.<sup>98</sup> The specific aspect of this philosophy that emphasizes the presence of God in every atom of creation is best summed up in the famous Qur'ānic saying: *Wheresoever you turn there is the Face of God.*<sup>99</sup> According to scholar Shahab Ahmed:

The fundamental idea of Akbarian philosophy is that all things are the manifestations (*tajjallīyāt*) by emanation of the Existence of God—a typical Ibn ʿArabī statement is “Whenever I said, ‘Creation,’ its Creator said, ‘There is nothing there except Me... Creation is Real-Truth [*haqīqat*], and the Essence-Archetype of Creation is its Creator.’<sup>100</sup>

For Ibn al-ʿArabī and his followers the hierarchy of creation is ranked according to its degree of manifesting God. After the prophets, the saints have the highest degree. A large corpus of Ibn al-ʿArabī's work is dedicated to explaining the complex hierarchical degrees and spiritual stations of saints. It is precisely in this context that Mullā Shāh's couplet quoted at the beginning of the chapter makes the most sense:

*Anyone who gazed with honest devotion upon the face of [Mullā] Shāh  
Wheresoever he looked, he saw the face of God*

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<sup>98</sup> No study has been done to date on the writings of Mullā Shāh. It would be worth examining the possible influences on his writing beyond Ibn al-ʿArabī. It is possible that he was also influenced by Fakhr al-Dīn ʿIrāqī (1213-1289), the great medieval saint and ecstatic poet who spent nearly two decades in South Asia. He was a Suhrawardī sufi, who later in his life was also greatly influenced by Ibn al-ʿArabī. Other possible influences could include Suhrawardī's *ʿIshrāqī* (emanationist) metaphysics.

<sup>99</sup> Quran, 2:115.

<sup>100</sup> Shahab Ahmad, *What Is Islam: The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 27.

Anyone who has gazed upon—to use Ibn al-‘Arabī’s term—the Perfected Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*) has experienced a concentrated dose of God’s emanation, and thus, all of creation is thereafter viewed through that intimate proximity to the divine. This concept of gazing upon an acknowledged *valī* as a means of entering the locus of divine emanation overlaps with the Indic concept of *darśan*.<sup>101</sup> In sufi literature it even comes close to the idea of avataric descent, in which God makes himself present in human form.

It is important to point out that sufi authors of metaphysical treatises, hagiographies and historical biographies of saints never use the Sanskrit word *darśan*. Instead, they utilize linguistic parallels from within Arabic and Persian. The closest and most often used analog is the word *naẓar*, or glance. Viewing the saint gives *feẓ*, or spiritual insight, to the disciple, at times even sending the viewer into ecstatic raptures. The infinitive verb *dīdan* is another favorite word used to describe this spiritual exchange. Mullā Shāh constantly evokes the act of looking, *dīdār*, at the beloved in his *Dīvān*. Another central term attached to the concept of sacred viewing is *barkat* (derived from *barakah* in Arabic), or divine blessings, that the devotee receives either through the act of viewing and being viewed by the saint, or through participating in the space occupied by the saint. This is why saints’ tomb shrines and places where they once prayed hold as much importance to devotees as witnessing the presence of the living saint. Furthermore, it is commonly acknowledged that a true *valī* or ‘*ārīf*’ (gnostic), owing to his or her intimate union with God, is ever living, even when the physical body has long been deceased. By this logic, *barkat* can also be accessed by touching the relics of saints. Diana Eck, describing *darśan* from an Indic perspective, says:

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101 It needs to be reiterated that in Islam there is no central saint-recognizing authority. The *valī* is usually recognized by his community of followers or the larger society as a gnostic through the *barakah* that he or she is believed to emanate. Saints in Islam are also known for working miracles (*karāmāt*).

*Darśan* is sometimes translated as the “auspicious sight” of the divine, and its importance in the Hindu ritual complex reminds us that for Hindus “worship” is not only a matter of prayers and offerings and the devotional disposition of the heart. Since, in the Hindu understanding, the deity is present in the image, the visual apprehension of the image is charged with religious meaning. Beholding the image is an act of worship; and through the eyes one gains the blessings of the divine.<sup>102</sup>

This explanation is true to varying degrees for all Indian religious traditions, including Islam as practiced in South Asia. Viewing living saints or prophets through this “auspicious sight” allows the devotee to witness the transcendent divinity—which in its essential reality is beyond physical representation or likeness—residing in the perfected being, the *insān al-kāmil*. In this respect, the Indic concept of *darśan* and the *Akbarian* notion of beholding the divine in human form are very similar. In Islamic *sharīʿa*, just as there is no authority that officially recognizes sainthood, there is no exoteric system that recognizes this devotional possibility, and given the overt iconophobia present in most Islamic law and practice, the idea of worshipping an “idol,” or image, is out of the question. However, within the mystical dimension of Islam, or Sufism, *valāya*—sainthood—acts as a bridge between the devotee and God. Rather than the image of the deity, the presence of the saint becomes central.<sup>103</sup> I argue that it is precisely the belief in this intermediary presence (*huṣūr*) that gave Dārā Shikoh and Jahānārā Begum the pretext for patronizing representations of known saints.

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102 Diana Eck, *Darśan*, 3

103 The popularity of the theme of the realized man becoming an agent for God’s manifestation is so prevalent in South Asian Muslim devotional expression that it is regularly found in *Qawwālī* music to this day. See, for example, a much loved Urdu *Qawwālī*, *ādmī ban āyā re mōlā*, which literally means, “God became man,” or “man became God” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s-CCvyNH8Ro>).

In the writings of Dārā Shikoh and Jahānārā Begum it is clear that the imperial siblings actively sought the blessings of both living and departed sages, and would go to great lengths to cultivate contact with them. This interest also inspired them to commission grand tomb complexes, collect and compose hagiographical literature and commission paintings. In both the *Risāla-i šāhibiyya* and the *Mū'nis al-arvāh*, Jahānārā Begum described her journeys to visit sufi saints. The act of viewing was a key aspiration in these accounts. In fact, in articulating her desire to view her spiritual master Mullā Shāh in person, despite royal and cultural taboos, her yearning reached such a fevered pitch that the saint eventually agreed to a clandestine meeting on the day of the princess's departure from Kashmir.<sup>104</sup> Similarly, Dārā Shikoh described at length the various graces he would receive from the act of viewing sages. For Dārā, being in the physical company of saints was as important as recording their utterances and likenesses.

It must be reiterated that the concept of devotional viewing represents more than just a literal meeting of the eyes. It includes the act of participating in the *barkat* that a sanctified person radiates. This same presence is also accessed through saints' relics and their shrines. The fact that most of the images of saints made for the express purpose of devotional viewing show their subjects in profile and looking away from the viewer does not diminish the function of these images. In many instances, as will be discussed in Chapter Four, portraits of individuals have been derived from earlier compositions that included two or more saints represented absorbed in their own acts of *darśan* (**Fig. 2.5**).

In paintings of the latter type the implied depiction of mutual viewing, spiritual radiation and the exchange of blessings between subjects mirrors the initiated viewer's

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104 Jahānārā Begum, *Risāla-i šāhibiyya*, 106-107.

engagement with the devotional image believed to prolong the saints' presence.

Moreover, in some of the more explicitly icon-like paintings that developed during and after Dārā Shikoh and Jahānārā Begum's era, the portraits utilized simplified, centralized compositions, framing devices and other pictorial conventions that present the saint as an object of exclusive contemplation.

A passage from Jahānārā's *Ṣāhibiyya* offers a particularly direct example of the transformative presence of the saint explained through the act of *naẓar*:

Shāh! You are he who, through the purity  
of the blessing of your *naẓar*, brings seekers to God.  
Everyone that you glance upon arrives at their desired destination,  
The light of your *naẓar* is but the Light of God<sup>105</sup>

The verse also reflects the sufi belief that once the saint has been perfected through the denial of his/her own self it is not s/he but God who acts and speaks through him/her. Jahānārā Begum concludes the key passage describing her initiation and the ritualistic viewing of portraits of her guide Mullā Shāh with the quatrain quoted above, which she joyously recites after emerging from a trance-like state.

It is no surprise that among the many epithets given to or assumed by Mullā Shāh, one of the most important ones was *lisān Allah*, or the Tongue of God.<sup>106</sup> The title also pays homage to arguably the most popular poet in the Persianate Balkans-to-Bengal complex, Ḥāfiẓ, who was known as *lisān al-ghayb*, Tongue of the Unseen.

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105 Jahānārā Begum, *Risāla-i ṣāhibiyya*, 103.

106 "Ordinary human beings, each strictly limited by his or her God-given 'capacity' (*isti'dād*) to apprehend the cosmos mentally, might, however, be vouchsafed a glimpse of the divine totality, through reverential contemplation of the refracted godly majesty upon the 'countenance' of a given 'saint'." Michael Barry, *Figurative Art in Medieval Islam*, 168.

## I. Sufism

Sufism, or *taṣawwuf*, as it is known locally, is the mystical dimension of Islam that guides the seeker toward union with God. Traditionally, scholars and metaphysicians alike have understood Islam to consist of three, often overlapping, hierarchical stations: namely, the Law (*sharī'at* in Persian); the Way or Path (*ṭarīqat*); and the Reality (*ḥaqīqat*). Sufism is seen as synonymous with the Way that guides practitioners to the Reality of God. However, it is also widely acknowledged by followers of Sufism that there is no *ṭarīqat* without the building blocks of *sharī'at*. This tripartite hierarchical division of the underlying function of religion is best summed up by one of the most widely read sufi poets in history, *Mawlānā* Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī:

The Religious Law [*sharī'at*] is like a candle showing the way. Unless you gain possession of the candle, there is no wayfaring; and when you have come on to the way, your wayfaring is the Path [the Way: *ṭarīqat*]; and when you have reached the journey's end, that is the Truth [*ḥaqīqat*]. Hence it has been said, "If the truths (realities) [*ḥaqāiq*] were manifest, the religious laws would be naught."<sup>107</sup>

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107 Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, and Reynold Alleyne Nicholson, *The Mathnawī of Jalālu'ddīn Rūmī* (London: Printed by Messrs. E.J. Brill, Leiden, for the Trustees of the "E. J.W. Gibb memorial" and published by Messrs. Luzac & Co, 1925-40), vol. 5: 1. Following is the complete citation:

The Religious Law [*sharī'at*] is like a candle showing the way. Unless you gain possession of the candle, there is no wayfaring; and when you have come on to the way, your wayfaring is the Path [the Way: *ṭarīqat*]; and when you have reached the journey's end, that is the Truth [*ḥaqīqat*]. Hence it has been said, "If the truths (realities) [*ḥaqāiq*] were manifest, the religious laws would be naught." As (for example), when copper becomes gold or was gold originally, it does not need the alchemy which is the Law, nor need it rub itself upon the philosophers' stone, which (operation) is the Path; (for), as has been said, it is unseemly to demand a guide after arrival at the goal, and blameworthy to discard the guide before arrival at the goal. In short, the Law [*sharī'at*] is like learning the theory of alchemy from a teacher or a book, and the Path [*ṭarīqat*] is (like) making use of chemicals and rubbing the copper upon the philosophers' stone, and the Truth [*ḥaqīqat*] is (like) the transmutation of the copper into gold. Those who know alchemy rejoice in their knowledge of it, saying, "We know the theory of this (science)"; and those who practice it rejoice in their practice of it, saying, "We perform such works"; and those who have experienced the reality rejoice in the reality, saying, "We have become gold and are delivered from the theory and practice of alchemy: we are God's freedmen." *Each party is rejoicing in what they have.*

Rūmī goes on to equate this tripartite division of religion with the process of alchemy.

The entire *raison d'être* of alchemy is to turn base metal into gold, and once that has been achieved, alchemy, “which is the law,” is no longer required. Only those travelers upon the Path that arrive to the Reality and have “become gold” are considered to be *awliyā'*. Not all sufis are saints, even though they are necessarily striving to understand the nature of God, and are thus called travelers on the path, *sālikūn*.

The history of sainthood in Islam (*valāya*) unfolds primarily within the domain of *taṣawwuf*, which is viewed as an aid to the deepening of one's faith, rather than constituting a separate religious path or sect. In South Asia, *taṣawwuf* is woven into the very fabric of Muslim culture and religious devotion is intrinsically linked to sufi saints and their shrines. For those practicing Sufism, the archetype of the spiritual guide is the Prophet Muḥammad himself. Sufism traces its origins back to him (**Fig. 2.6**). In fact, the sufis believe the Prophetic substance to be the first creation of God, similar to the Christian word that became flesh in the form of Christ.<sup>108</sup> Known as the *Nūr-i Muḥammadī*, it is the light from which all other creation was generated. Muslim saints are believed to share that light of the Prophet, allowing for the almost ritualistic worship awarded to certain individuals. For instance, the twelfth-century Isma'īlī *Satpanthī* saint from Multan, Shāh Shams, describes the Prophet's spiritual successor, son-in-law and nephew, 'Alī, as the tenth incarnation of Vishnu in the form of the *Kālki* Avatar, encouraging his followers to worship 'Alī as the light of God (**Fig. 2.7**).<sup>109</sup> As this example demonstrates, Muslims in the Subcontinent absorbed many local devotional

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108 'Abdul Ḥaqq Muḥaddith-i Dehlavī, *Akḥbār al-akhyār*, translated into Urdu by Subḥān Maḥmūd and Muḥammad Fāzil (Lahore: Akbar Book Publications, 2004), 21-27.

109 Tazim R. Kassam, *Songs of Wisdom and Circles of Dance: Hymns of the Satpanthī Ismā'īlī Muslim Saint, Pīr Shams* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 168.



practices and conventions unique to the region that expanded the complex structure of saint devotion.

It is important not to view the influence of local Indic traditions on Muslim devotional culture solely as a form of “syncretism.” In Barbara Metcalfe’s words we should be wary of seeing this Indianization as a “story of accommodation to local practices summed up by terms like ‘syncretic,’ ‘hybrid,’ or ‘tolerant.’”<sup>110</sup> In the process of incorporating and amplifying practices like *darśan*, India’s Islamic traditions became localized and, in Richard Eaton’s view, “part of South Asia’s cultural landscape, thereby harmonizing the truth-claims of a universal religion with the peculiarities of South Asian cultures.”<sup>111</sup> It is from this very perspective that I am demonstrating how the saint adulation that led to devotional representations—while being peculiar to India—was considered by the practitioners themselves to be intrinsically rooted in the truth-claims of Islamic orthodoxy. Annemarie Schimmel explains that seemingly heterodox trends were incorporated at all levels of Muslim society, “but one should not overemphasize them; on the whole the life of the Indian Muslims was patterned according to the injunctions of the Koran and the *sunna* of the Prophet, and this resembles in its fundamentals Muslim life anywhere.”<sup>112</sup>

## II. Tazkira Literature

The earliest and most longstanding form of saint devotion in Islam is the literary depiction of the lives of saints, known as the *tazkira*, or remembrance. It constitutes one

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110 Barbara Metcalfe, *Islam in South Asia in Practice* (Princeton University Press, 2009), xxi-xxiii.

111 Richard Eaton, *India’s Islamic Traditions, 711-1750* (Oxford University Press, 2003), 20.

112 Annemarie Schimmel, *Islam in the Indian Subcontinent, vol. IV* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1980), 108. By entering the field through this lens I hope to also undermine two binaries that have been imposed by twentieth and twenty-first-century scholarship: Muslim versus South Asia, and Sufism/heterodoxy versus shari’a/orthodoxy.

of the most prolific genres in the history of Muslim literature. Starting with traditions related to the life of Muḥammad and the first four caliphs, the genre was standardized in the tenth century by the Malāmatī sufi ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Sulamī in his *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣufiyya*, and popularized by the twelfth-century Persian mystic Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār with his *Tazkirāt al-awliyā’* (Remembrances of the Friends of God).<sup>113</sup> This genre quickly took root and flourished in India from the fourteenth century onward.

Very often, the visual iconography of sufi saints in Indian painting draws directly from these hagiographical “portraits,” which serve as prototypes for the later visual iterations. One of the principle functions of the portraits becomes clearer when we understand the motivations of the authors of the *tazkira* genre. The first complete anthology focusing primarily on Indian sufis, titled *Akḥbār al-akhyār* (Accounts of the Virtuous Ones), was written in 1590/91 by ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq Muḥaddith-i Dehlavī. The Chishtī sufi, one of the greatest scholars of *Ḥadīth* literature in the Muslim world in his time, explained his intentions in the introduction:

*Benefits of Remembering the Friends of God:*

Know that the Friends and Beloveds of God are the very reason for the descent of God’s mercy, and the means for attaining nearness to Him. Because the lover enjoys remembering his beloved the beloved also in turn adores remembering the lover.<sup>114</sup> Therefore, remembering these elders is a form of worship (*‘ibādat*) that anyone can practice without great effort in any state, and can thus achieve nearness to God... it is necessary to engender that kind of relationship and ardor between the invoker and the Invoked that causes invocation. By listening to anecdotes from the lives of the elders the heart acquires this discerning relationship.

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113 See, Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥusayn Sulamī, *Kitab tabaqat al-Sufiyya: texte arabe avec une introduction et un index par Johannes Pedersen* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960); and, Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār and Reynold Alleyne Nicholson, *Tadhkiratu 'l-Awliya (Memoirs of the Saints)* (London: Luzac, 1905). For a detailed list of early *tazkirās* from India see, Rizvi. *A History of Sufism in India*, vol.I, 4-17.

114 Here reference is made to the Qur’ānic “Remember Me and I will remember you” (2:152).

And it is natural that upon hearing these anecdotes a person should think in his heart that the elders only attained their everlasting joy by becoming icons of good deeds. In such a person's heart an enduring attraction for moving towards good deeds will surely be produced. It is also possible that those pure and sacred spirits are pleased by our remembrance, and in exchange they also remember us in the hereafter and open their doors to help the seeker.<sup>115</sup>

The author's primary intention is to stimulate in his reader the desire to achieve nearness to God by remembering the "friends," who have become "icons of good deeds." For Dehlavī, it is through emulating the "good deeds," the *husn-i 'amal*, which makes his audience partake in the actions of the saints and keeps their presence alive in them.

Through this active participation in the virtues the devotee can, in turn, aspire to become the very "icon" that attracts and radiates the divine presence through its beauty. Secondly, since the friends of God are believed to have found union with God and are therefore the true *Shuhudā* (plural of *Shahīd*, which means both martyr and witness of God's Reality), they are said to be ever living.<sup>116</sup> And it is precisely because of their ever-lasting union in God that they are said to hear the heartfelt prayers of the believers and act as a timeless bridge for the devotee. Dārā Shikoh's own birth, for instance, was considered a miracle that transpired through the intercession of a saint. Emperor Shāh Jahān is said to have prayed for an heir at the shrine of Khwāja Mu'īn al-Dīn Chishtī (d. 1236) at Ajmer.<sup>117</sup>

The Mughal court patronized Dehlavī and his work was widely circulated in the seventeenth-century Indo-Persian world, influencing the early writings of Dārā Shikoh.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Dehlavī, *Akhhār al-Akhyār*, 31.

<sup>116</sup> Qur'ān, 2:154.

<sup>117</sup> Craig Davis, "The Yogic Exercises of the 17th century Sufis," in *Theory and Practice of Yoga: Essays in Honour of Gerald James Larson* ed. by Knut A. Jacobsen (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 304.

<sup>118</sup> Supriya Gandhi has discussed the influence of Dehlavī on Dārā Shikoh's hagiographical oeuvre. She suggests that there might even have been a subtle rivalry between the Qādirī branch of saints privileged by

As an extension to Dehlavī's introduction, Dārā Shikoh also elaborated on the value of remembering the *awliyā*' in the introduction to his biography of the saints, *Safīnat al-awliyā*', written in the year of his initiation, 1640:

This humble servant considers himself (Dārā Shikoh) to be a firm follower of the company of the Friends (*awliyā*'). Which is why he considers it his good fortune to write about their lives and deeds in this book. He who does not obtain union or viewing of the beloved has to pacify the fire of love with the remembrance of the beloved... Being in their presence awards closeness with God; seeking them out is akin to yearning for God; association with them is association and proximity to God."<sup>119</sup>

The intention of remembering or evoking the saints for the sake of internalizing their presence—a concern clearly proclaimed by authors writing *tazkirāt*—is also suggested by some patrons who commissioned portraits of saints. In the album preface to a late seventeenth-century Kashmiri compilation of paintings, the unidentified patron explains that, “since I have the means and capacity, I should endeavor to preserve/protect (*hifẓ*) the names of the saints and elders” (Fig. 4.42). The Arabic word *hifẓ*, which literally means to protect something, is commonly used for the act of memorizing the Qur'ān. A *ḥāfiẓ*, like the famous Persian poet of Shirāz, is one who has committed the entire Qur'ān to memory. The patron's use of this specific word for memorializing saints' images situates his act within a sacred sphere, while also connecting it to the larger *tazkira* tradition. Just as reading or hearing about the good deeds of the *awliyā*', according to Dehlavī, inspires the follower to act virtuously, visually imbibing the

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Dehlavī and the one presented by Dārā Shikoh. See, Supriya Gandhi, “Mughal Self-Fashioning, Indic Self-Realization” (PhD dissertation, Harvard University, 2011), 73-74.

119 Dārā Shikoh, *Safīnat ul-awliyā*', Urdu translation by Muhammad 'Alī Luṭfī (Karachi: Nafīs Academy, 1959), 17-19.

image of the *valī* can also activate latent piety within the devotee. In both visual and literary representations the saint acts as an archetype that can be mirrored in the individual microcosm.

Another similarity between *tazkira* literature and devotional portraiture is the way in which they collapse the very notion of time by including saints from different eras within a single space. Owing to the idea of their immortality in God, the *awliyā*’ become a living reminder of God’s eternal reality that transcends spatial and temporal limitations. Contemporary saints cohabitate with ones long past, and those from earlier times radiate potency equal to that of those who are still alive in the worldly sense. In *tazkira* literature it is very common for deceased saints to visit or communicate with living sufis. Various anecdotes describe sacred gatherings in which the author or narrator witnesses saints across time and space. Similarly, in an important sub-genre of saints’ portraits, preeminent members of South Asian sufi orders are shown congregated in a circle. The earliest known painted representations of this sub-genre come from the Shāh Jahān period (Fig. 4.21). Significantly, both Jahānārā and Dārā Shikoh, writing at the same time, mention that they experienced personal visions of such gatherings.

### III. The Visualization of Saints

The visual and literary representation of saints was also linked to an esoteric religious concept: visualization of the spiritual guide during prescribed ritual practice. Visualization has long functioned as a method of meditation in sufi orders across the world. In addition to the daily repetition of litanies and certain names of God that are given to the new initiate when he or she enters a *ṭarīqa* (sufi order), the novice is also

taught how to visualize the image of his or her guide in the mind. This technique is called *taṣavvur-i shaykh* and its ultimate aim is annihilation in the spiritual substance of the master. Athar Abbas Rizvi explains that, “Generally dervishes meditated on some particular verse of the Qur’an, and at the same time an image of the *pir* (guide) was recalled to mind.”<sup>120</sup> In a fourteenth-century collection of the spiritual utterances of Naṣīr al-Dīn Maḥmūd Chirāgh-i Dehlī, the revered poet and saint recalls his *shaykh*, Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā’ of the Chishtī order, saying that, “*Zikr* (remembrance of God) should be continually recited at the same time as a recollection in the heart of the presence of one’s guide.”<sup>121</sup> This practice of recalling the presence of the spiritual master while in meditation is common to the two most influential sufi orders of India, the Qādirīyya and the Chishtīyya. According to Rizvi, “The preliminary requirement for the *zikr* of a Chishti disciple was to imagine that his Shaikh was personally present before him, directing his contemplation. The practice amounted to a belief that the Shaikh’s spirit was divine both in its emanation and power.”<sup>122</sup> Another medieval-period Chishtī account confirming the practice of visualizing the presence of the guide describes how one of Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā’s representatives asked him, “should contemplation of God’s essence be in tandem with contemplation of the Prophet and one’s guide or separate?” Nizām al-Dīn answered, “both are permissible. If one contemplates all the presences together, then keep God in front, the Prophet on His right and the guide on His left.”<sup>123</sup>

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120 Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, vol. I, 102.

121 Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, vol. I, 181.

122 Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, vol. I, 218.

123 Dehlavī, *Akḥbār al-Akhyār*, 218.

i. Dārā Shikoh and Jahānārā Begum on Visualizing the Guide

Dārā Shikoh's *Risāla-i ḥaqqnumā* (*Truth-Revealing Treatise*) is a sufi manual detailing the various stations, or *maqāmāt*, along the Way, as well as the methods required for traveling through each station (**Fig. 2.8**). The treatise describes visualization of the guide as a first step that eventually leads to visions of the Prophet and other friends of God. He explains in the introduction that he was told by God Himself to write this treatise for aspirants on the path, and was thus inspired to reveal the Qādirī techniques of the saint Miyyān Mīr as taught to him by Mullā Shāh.<sup>124</sup> Every stage or world on the traveler's path is part of the ontological hierarchy as outlined by Ibn al-ʿArabī. These divisions coexist at once in the macrocosm of the outer world and the microcosm of the inner human domain. Dārā Shikoh explains that a novice on the spiritual path must first meditate on the image of his or her guide by imagining the guide's image in the heart.

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124 Dārā Shikoh, *Risāla-i Ḥaqqnumā*, 4.

“By ‘*ālam-i nāsūt* is meant that same World of Sensuous Forms that some call the World of Witness; the World of Dominion; the World of Conjecture; and the World of Awakening. Degree of extreme existence and perfect enjoyment are in this very world. O friend! When a grief stricken one in this ‘*ālam-i nāsūt* arrives at seeking the Truth, he should first of all go to isolated places and visualize the image (*ṣūrat*) of that *faqīr* of whom he maintains a high opinion, or the image of s/he with whom he maintains a relationship of deep love. The technique of visualization is to close the eyes and while focusing on the heart, observe with the eye of the heart. O Friend, according to this *faqīr* (Dārā Shikoh), the heart is found in three regions. One is within the breast, under the left nipple. It is called *dil-i sunobarī* (the pineal heart), because it is in the shape and form of a pinecone...

“...and meditating on (the technique of) visualization mentioned above occurs in the pineal heart. And this ideal image, which is witnessed with the eye of the heart, is named the ‘*ālam-i mīthāl* (World of Ideal Forms). Since this visualization is the prelude to the opening towards the ‘*ālam-i malakūt* (The World of Symbolic/Angelic Forms), it has been separated from Symbolic Forms and has been named the ‘*ālam-i mīthāl* (World of Ideal Forms). Otherwise (in actuality) the World of Ideal Forms penetrates the Angelic/Symbolic. O friend, when you start visualization in the aforementioned method, gradually the image and that which is imagined will become fixed, initiating the opening of ‘*ālam-i malakūt* (The World of Symbolic/Angelic Forms). Inasmuch as this image is well implanted in your vision, you will triumph over the World of Ideal Forms. And when you have mastered this (method) no image from the images that you had not seen before will remain hidden from you.”

This visualization will give the spiritual traveler access to the worlds above the earthly plane. In his biography of Miyān Mīr and Mullā Shāh, *Sakīnat al-awliyā'*, he mentions that he once sent a servant to visit Miyān Mīr on his behalf. When the saint was asked to teach him something for his spiritual practice, Miyān Mīr said, “you should contemplate on the face of your guide.”<sup>125</sup>

Dārā Shikoh's *Ḥaqqnumā* presents a clear picture of the creational hierarchy as envisioned by the Qādirīyya, the branch of Sufism most prevalent in North India at the time, and the initial methods that they prescribed to guide acolytes through these ontological regions. According to this framework, the sensorial world is the lowest rung on the ladder leading to union with God. The first step toward the larger spiritual goal is harnessing the senses in order to visualize the “beloved” or a *faqīr* who is held in “high opinion.” Both terms are commonly used sobriquets for the spiritual guide. Once the image of the guide is firmly established in the heart, the World of Ideal Forms, which is one step above the sensorial world, is conquered and the doors to the upper realm, the World of Symbolic Forms, open, giving visionary access to entities that were not previously perceivable by the initiate. In the second chapter of the treatise Dārā Shikoh describes the World of Symbolic Forms, linking the initial visualization of the guide to the eventual viewing of the Prophet of Islam himself (*italics are my own*):

...Hence when you have toiled and labored on the aforementioned practices the rust on your heart will be removed, and the mirror of your heart will be illumined. And the images of the prophets, the friends of God, and the angels will reflect therein. *The image of your guide will reveal to you the image of the Prophet, his great companions and the exalted friends of God.* From those images if you question any face with the tongue of your heart or the tongue of expression you will hear an

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125 Dārā Shikoh, *Sakīnat ul-awliyā'*, 44.



answer, and the certainty of your heart will increase. You will have complete contentment in the *‘ālam-i malakūt* (World of Symbolic Forms). And when you gaze upon the image of the Prophet, know with certainty that it is indeed the image of the Prophet!<sup>126</sup>

As I will discuss in Chapter Four, after analyzing Dārā’s explanation, it becomes evident that Jahānārā Begum learned this method from her brother. In the *Ṣāhibiyya* (1641-42) Princess Jahānārā gives an account of the practice of visualization as an aid to gaining intimacy with the Divine Beloved. Her recollections are similar, yet far more personal, than those given by her brother in *Ḥaqqnumā*: “And during certain prescribed times I would contemplate on the image of Haẓrat’s (Mullā Shāh’s) blessed face. And on the first day [of my initiation], my learned brother... engaged me in the technique of *tawajjuh* (concentration) on the face of the Guide and *taṣavvur* (visualization) of the faces of the Prophet and the four honorable friends [the first four caliphs] and the other *awliyā’ Allah*.”<sup>127</sup> In this statement she clearly distinguishes between the technique of concentrating on a *shabīh* (image/portrait) of the Guide and the standard method of *taṣavvur* (mental visualization). Later in the same account she again narrates how, only a few days prior to her departure from Mullā Shāh’s home of Kashmir, she focused her attention on her guide’s face while deep in meditation. During this nightly vigil she

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126 The immediately preceding section reads:

This world (of Symbolic Forms) is also called the World of Spirits; the Unseen World; the Subtle World; and the Dream World. The image of the Earthly World is subject to extinction. But the image of this World of Symbolic Forms, which is the archetype of the Earthly World, can never be extinguished. It subsists forever... O friend, the World of Ideal Forms, which was mentioned above (in the preceding chapter), is the key to the World of Symbolic/Angelic Forms, and by the ideal image – which is seen after closing your (physical) eyes – is meant the spirit of that image, not the body. Thus it became apparent that the spirits of people are present without bodies (in the World of Symbolic Forms) with the very image that they possessed in the World of Witness (the earthly realm). And they can be brought into view at any time...

127 Jahānārā Begum, *Risāla-i ṣāhibiyya*, 101.

envisioned the shawl that Mullā Shāh always wore wrapped around his shoulders, wishing that it would be given to her as a going away gift. The next morning her eunuch came to her from Mullā Shāh's house bringing the very shawl, sent by the sage (see Chapter Four for a complete discussion of this episode). After this incident her faith in the Qādirī *ṭarīqa* and her guide increased immensely. In her joy she rubbed the shawl all over her face to benefit from the saint's *barakah*.<sup>128</sup>

The growing number of paintings made for devotional viewing after the mid-seventeenth century suggests that certain Indian sufi orders allowed for the visualization of saints in the form of actual portraits, in order to support the disciple's capacity to view their guides with the "eye of the heart." It is clear from the siblings' accounts that they both practiced the visualization of Mullā Shāh according to the prescribed method, and that his image was seen as an extension of the Prophetic presence, which was in turn understood to be an aspect of God's immanence. Mullā Shāh's poetry alludes to the fact that he viewed his own person as a locus for the manifestation of God's radiance:

O [Shāh], on your face glows a Light from God  
 Keep that Light on your face open for all  
 Your friends (disciples) are the *awliyā'* of this time  
 I am proud of you, O Shāh of *awliyā'*, Mullā Shāh!<sup>129</sup>

Bearing witness to the efficacy of the Qādirī method outlined by Dārā Shikoh, Jahānārā Begum, in the same account, describes how this concentration on the face of Mullā Shāh led her into an ecstatic visionary state in which she saw herself participating in a spiritual gathering led by the Prophet himself. The sacred gathering (*majlis*, *samā'*,

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128 Jahānārā Begum, *Risāla-i ṣāhibiyya*, 104-105.

129 Jahānārā Begum, *Risāla-i ṣāhibiyya*, 94.

or *mehfil*) is an integral part of sufi ritual practice in which initiates congregate around a leader for communal prayer, chanting and dancing (**Fig. 2.3**). It is important to note that, as a senior lady of the royal harem, Jahānārā would not have had the opportunity to attend such gatherings. Keeping this in mind, the profusion of certain types of images made to function as supports for meditation points to Jahānārā's pivotal role as a patron.

Dārā Shikoh also describes an occasion when, deep in concentration, he had a vision of a similar gathering:

One night this *faqīr* (Dārā Shikoh) saw the Prophet—prayers and peace be upon him—sitting on a dais. Abu Bakr and 'Umar were sitting on his right, with Junayd next to them. 'Uthmān and 'Alī were on his right, and my Pīr Ghawth al-thaqalayn ('Abd al-Qādir Jīlānī) was next to them. Dhun-nūn al-Miṣrī, Bashr Hafī, and many of the great *shaykhs* including Mawlānā 'Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī and my teacher, Shaykh Mīr (Miyān Mīr), were also present in the gathering.<sup>130</sup>

Chapter Four includes a discussion of what I have called the "*majlis* paintings," which were first made during the Shāh Jahān period, and rapidly became a favorite theme in this genre. It is my contention that, in addition to other narrative layers, these paintings illustrate visions of "imagined" gatherings that the patrons "witnessed" while engaged in visualizing their guides and other saints during meditation.

#### **IV. Seeing the Face of a Saint is an Act of Worship**

The notion that a saint's face is a manifestation of God's beauty is a widely accepted phenomenon in Muslim culture. Moreover, the paradox of a mortal form manifesting the absolute has been part of the Muslim imagination throughout its history.

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<sup>130</sup> Dārā Shikoh, *Ḥasanāt ul- 'ārifīn*, 16.

Abu Ḥurayra, one of the main transmitters of Prophetic utterances, proclaimed that, “I have memorized two kinds of teachings from God’s Apostle. I have transmitted one of them to you, but if I transmitted the second, my throat would be cut.”<sup>131</sup> It is this second group of utterances that the sufis claim were transmitted to them by word of mouth, from master to disciple. These esoteric teachings, known as *shaṭhiyāt*, contain *koan*-like paradoxical statements meant to assist the spiritual traveler in overcoming the limitations of mind and logic.<sup>132</sup> Such sayings initiated a tradition of seemingly subversive, ecstatic utterances, the most well known and contentious of them being the statement of the eleventh-century sufi, Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj: “I am the Truth!” *Shaṭhiyāt* were often, though not always, linked to Malāmatī and Qalandarī sufis (See Chapter Three for a detailed commentary on Qalandars). The twelfth-century Persian mystic Ruzbihān Baqlī was the first to compile them in a volume.<sup>133</sup>

Following this literary convention Dārā Shikoh also compiled a collection of *shaṭhiyāt* in his *Ḥasanāt*. The book begins with paradoxical Qur’ānic sayings, many of which, though clearly not considered to be *shaṭhiyāt*, are favorites among sufis. Also included are sayings of contemporary Indian sages recorded by the prince himself. Like almost all compilations of mystical sayings and *tazkirāt* his volume begins with prayers and blessings on the Prophet, with *Ḥadīth* and Qur’ānic verses woven into its very fabric. These verses perform a dual function: first and foremost, they consecrate the text with divine and Prophetic *barakah*; secondarily, they seal the arguments and opinions

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131 Ismail Bukhari, *Sahih Bukhari*, vol. I, section 3, hadith 121.

132 “In Islamic mysticism, a *shat’h* is an outrageous or paradoxical utterance intended to jolt the mind of the disciple and force him to awaken from the torpor of routine ritual observance to a higher state of spiritual awareness.” Michael A. Barry, *Figurative Art In Medieval Islam and the Riddle of Bihzād of Herāt (1465-1535)* (Paris: Flammarion, 2004), 16.

133 Carl Ernst, “Ruzbihan,” in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition* (Brill Online, 2011).

contained in the volume with Prophetic authority, thereby legitimizing the text. As has been mentioned earlier, the main intention of the *Hasanāt* was to counter mounting accusations of unorthodoxy coming from the more exoteric quarters of Indo-Islamic religious scholarship.<sup>134</sup> These were the very accusations that allowed Dārā's younger brother Aurangzeb to execute him on charges of heresy in 1659.

In recent studies of Dārā Shikoh's oeuvre both Supriya Gandhi and Munis Faruqi have shown that the prince's spiritual perspective was in continuity with a certain convention of Indo-Islamic metaphysical writing, even as his outlook changed over time.<sup>135</sup> In the 1640s his primary focus was the *Akbarian* school of sufi thought, as is shown by his own devotional poetry and biographies of saints. In the 1650s, leading up to his death in 1659, he was increasingly attracted to Hindu spiritual traditions, and his writings included translations of the Upaniṣads and commentaries on the Vedas. The *Hasanāt* bridges these two great interests. Beginning with classical sufi utterances, the treatise goes on to include anecdotes from the lives of both Muslim and non-Muslim Indian saints, including Kabīr and Lā'l Das. Despite accusations of "heterodoxy," claims that were used as a political ruse for his execution, Faruqi argues that Dārā Shikoh was in fact not unique in his belief in the unity of religions. "Dara Shukoh's arguments about Hindu-Muslim resonances were not entirely unprecedented or novel in the Indian context. Very similar arguments had already been made by other scholars including Saiyid 'Abdul Quddus Gangohi (d. 1537), Saiyid Muhammad Ghaus Gwaliori (d. 1563), and Mir

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134 Dārā Shikoh, *Hasanāt*, 2.

135 Munis D. Faruqi, "Dara Shukoh, Vedanta, and Imperial Succession in Mughal India", in *Religious Interactions in Mughal India*, ed. Dalmia, Vasudha, and Munis Daniyal Faruqi (New Delhi, India : Oxford University Press, 2014); and, Supriya Gandhi's dissertation.

‘Abdul Wahid Bilgrami (d. 1608).’<sup>136</sup> While the immediate success of the *Ḥasanāt* might be questioned, by including sayings from the Qur’ān and utterances of the Prophet as well as notable companions and renowned saints, Dārā Shikoh follows the longstanding convention of couching his beliefs in Islamic orthopraxy. Even when his interests became increasingly wide-ranging his writings continued to be part of a continuum rather than an isolated aberration. One of the chief aims of the *Ḥasanāt*—to show that God’s reality is present in realized saints—conforms to the norms of Islamic orthopraxy.

Using the already mentioned idea of Prophetic light, Dārā Shikoh’s accounts are replete with notions of God’s immanence in creation, and since the best of creation is the *insān al-kāmil*, or the perfected being, the light is reflected most directly in him/her. Owing to this, there are numerous justifications for the act of viewing a saint. The concept of the Prophetic light animating all of existence comes across through the words of an Egyptian Qalandarī saint named Suleymān Miṣrī (**Fig. 2.9**), whom Dārā Shikoh met in Lahore in 1653:

...he said that one of the exegetists wrote in a treatise that the Light of Muḥammad (*Nūr-i Muḥammadī*)—on him be prayers and peace—was placed in a candelabra. All those who viewed his head became kings; those who saw Muḥammad’s eyes became mystics; those who looked at his chest became the group of holy-lovers; those who witnessed his mouth became scholars; and those who lay their eyes on his lower body became Christians, Jews and infidels.<sup>137</sup>

In a similar vein, Mullā Shāh praises the Prophet in this poem:

Within the Hidden Treasure, Truth was veiled  
For the Love of Muḥammad it became manifest

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136 Munis D. Faruqi, “Dara Shukoh, Vedanta, and Imperial Succession in Mughal India,” 40.

137 Dārā Shikoh, *Ḥasanāt*, 77-78.

If Aḥmad had not been,<sup>138</sup>  
 The Light of the One would not have manifested  
 Until there was One, all was One  
 The eye of [the letter] *mīm* caused this abundance (of existence)<sup>139</sup>  
 He who gains a single *naẓar* (sight) from Aḥmad,  
 On his head glows the sun of Mercy<sup>140</sup>

In the *Dabistān-i mazāhib* the anonymous author, in his section on Sufism, summarizes the aforementioned concept of divinity embodied in the human being by quoting established, traditional sufi voices.<sup>141</sup> The author, who personally knew Jahānārā Begum, Mullā Shāh and their sufi circle, explains how sufis understood a popular saying attributed to the Prophet, that God created man in His own image: “The sufis say that in the command [of God], ‘God created Adam in His own image,’ the association is that the sovereignty of [God’s] act [passes down] to us (humans), and it is also linked with [the fact that] the face [of Adam] is the mirror of [God’s] Essence.”<sup>142</sup> He follows this with a lengthy exposition on the ontological hierarchy of creation using principles outlined by Ibn al-‘Arabī, Ruzbihān Baqlī and others. Briefly put, his treatise echoes the Islamic metaphysical sentiment of seventeenth-century India. This principle of seeing God

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138 Aḥmad is another name of the Prophet of Islam.

139 Mullā Shah is here referring to the oft-quoted *Hadīth* attributed to the Prophet in which he said, “I am Aḥmad without the letter Mīm”. If the letter “m” is taken out of “Aḥmad” it becomes “Aḥad” which is one of names of God meaning “The One”. The “Hidden Treasure” is alluding to an utterance in which God is said to have spoken on the tongue of the Prophet that, “I was a Hidden Treasure, and loved to be known, so I created the world, so that I may be known”. For a detailed discussion of Muslim ontology and the concept of divine immanence see, William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-‘Arabi’s Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989). For an exquisite example of the concept of divinity witnessing its own beauty in Islamic painting see, folio 23 of the sixteenth-century Ottoman illustration to a collection of mystical poems titled *Rawzat-ul ‘Ushshaq*, in the Harvard University Art Museums (1985.216.3). Also see Michael Barry, *Figurative art in medieval Islam*, 18.

140 Mirza Tawakul Beg, *Nuskhā-i aḥwāl-i Shāhī*, British Library Manuscript Or.3202, folio 4a.

141 Kaykhusraw Isfandiyār, Muhsinsin Fānī, and Rahīm Rizāzādah-’i Malik, *Dabistān-i mazāhib* (Tihirān: Kitkhānah-’i Ṭahūrī, 1983).

142 *Dabistān-i mazāhib*, 346.

everywhere, namely, the immanence of God in His creation, is one of the foundations of Dārā Shikoh's *Ḥasanāt*.

*Ḥasanāt* begins with the Qur'ānic, "He is the First and the Last, the Outwardly Manifest and the Inwardly Hidden..."<sup>143</sup> It is immediately followed by, "Wheresoever you turn, there is the face of God." Dārā Shikoh takes it to mean that, "wherever you look, it is My (God's) face. Which means that your (the saint's) face is My face."<sup>144</sup> This is a direct reference to the well-known Prophetic *Ḥadīth* that is found in both Shi'ite and Sunni sources which states that, "looking at the face of 'Alī is worship."<sup>145</sup> Many traditional exegetes link this utterance with the Qur'ānic verse 55 of chapter five which says, "Your guardian-friend (*valī*) can be only God; and His messenger and those who have faith, who establish worship and pay the poor due, and bow down (in prayer)."<sup>146</sup> God not only calls Himself by the word *valī*, but also includes the Prophet and the faithful (*mu'minūn*), hence the title *awliyā'* (plural of *valī*) for Muslim saints. According to this verse the exemplars among the faithful are those who give while bowed down during ritual prayer. This is seen as a Qur'ānic allusion to 'Alī who once gave his ring while bowed in prayer when a beggar came petitioning for alms in the mosque.<sup>147</sup> Following this Qur'ānic allusion as well as many other utterances, sufis have traditionally seen 'Alī as the essence of sainthood, a direct link between the spiritual traveler and the

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143 Qur'ān, 57:3.

144 Dārā Shikoh, *Ḥasanāt*, 4.

145 Al-Ḥākim al-Nīsābūrī, *Al-Mustadrak 'alā'l-ṣaḥīḥayn* (Beirut, 2002), p. 938, no. 4736. A slightly different version of this is one of the sayings of the Prophet transmitted on the authority of Abū Bakr, 'Gazing upon the face of 'Alī is an act of worship (al-nazar ilā wajhi 'Alī 'ibāda),' in Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūfī, *Ta'rīkh al-khulafā'*, tr. H.S. Jarrett, *History of the Caliphs* (Amsterdam, 1970), 97.

146 Qur'ān 5:55, Pickthall.

147 For a detailed list of traditional commentaries on this verse see, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary* (New York: Harper Collins Publications, 2015), 307.



Prophet of Islam, and, consequently, to direct identity with God. In Islamic metaphysics all the great sufi brotherhoods trace themselves, through an unbroken chain of masters, back to the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law 'Alī. Every saint, or *valī*, owing to his or her self-effacement and extinction in God, shares this function awarded to the prince of saints: namely, becoming a locus for the manifestation of God.<sup>148</sup>

An influential *tazkira* written in the reign of Jahāngīr by the Chishtī sufi Allah Diya, titled *Siyr al-aqtāb*, mentions another key saying attributed to the Prophet regarding 'Alī: "Whoever wishes to see the knowledge of Adam, the purity of Joseph, the excellence of Moses, and the majesty of Muḥammad, may look upon 'Alī ibn Abū Ṭālib."<sup>149</sup> Sayings such as this provide evidence that the conceptual premises for viewing the face of a "God-Man" originated within Islamic tradition, rather than being merely a syncretistic borrowing from other systems of belief.

William Chittick quotes a *Ḥadīth*, which although disputed, was used by Ibn al-'Arabī. It provides a possible metaphysical context for the convention of representing beardless youths in Persian and Indian painting: "I saw my Lord in the form of a beardless youth, wearing a cloak of gold, upon his head a crown of gold, and upon his feet sandals of gold" (**Fig. 4.8**).<sup>150</sup> In Chapter Four I will discuss this conception of divinity and its relation to allegorical representations associated with Dārā Shikoh's early patronage.

Dārā's *Ḥasanāt* is part of a long tradition of South Asian sufi literature that highlights the transformative power of viewing a saint through *darśan* or *naẓar*. One *naẓar* can send

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148 For example see, Dehlavī, *Akhhbār al-akhyār*, 27.

149 Allah Diya Chishtī, *Siyr al-aqtāb* (British Library Manuscript Or. 214, 1612), 5-6.

150 Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 396, f.n. 3. See also, Annemarie Schimmel, *As Through a Veil: Mystical Poetry in Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 67-68.

the disciple into ecstatic rapture. An early Indian Muslim example comes from a biography of the beloved South Asian saint, Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā' of Delhi, written by his Hindu disciple Rāj Kumār Hardev in the fourteenth century.<sup>151</sup> He explains:

*Ḥaẓrat* [Nizām al-Dīn] lifted his gaze toward me. His eyes were wet with tears, and in those tears it seemed as if I could see the entire cosmos swaying to and fro. *Ḥaẓrat* only looked at me, he didn't utter a word, and I started trembling. Within his tears I saw everything and in a state of selflessness I got up to kiss his feet. But as soon as I got up something within me started to whirl. Instead of going to place my head at *Ḥaẓrat*'s feet I started dancing in the center of the gathering. Every moment I wanted to restrain myself and abstain from this rudeness and insolence, but I no longer had any power or control over myself. I could see the sky and earth dancing and whirling before me. I was not unconscious, I could understand and see everything, but I could not explain what was happening within me and why I was dancing... *Ḥaẓrat* was weeping profusely and my gaze was fixed on his face. In each tear there were such wondrous depths that I cannot express them in words. In his tears I could see my country, my parents, the statue of Krishna Jī playing the reed.<sup>152</sup>

The episode is a revealing account of Hindu-Muslim spiritual symbiosis in medieval India. For Rāj Kumār Hardev the concept of *darśan* unexpectedly becomes a spiritually rewarding experience given to him by “one of the most lovable and charismatic of Indian sufi Shaykhs, perhaps the most historically influential of them all” (**Fig. 2.10**).<sup>153</sup> Dehlavī mentions how another thirteenth-century Chishtī saint from Delhi, Nūr al-Dīn Ghaznavī, “gained the entire *feẓ* (spiritual knowledge passed from master to disciple) from his

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151 The only existing copy of the Persian original, titled *Chehel Roze*, is in the library of Bharatpur, Rajasthan. For an Urdu translation see, Rāj Kumār Hardev, *Nizāmī Bansarī*, translated by Khwāja Ḥasan Nizāmī and edited by Maḥmūd ul-Raḥmān (Islamabad: Dost Publications, 2000).

152 Rāj Kumār Hardev, *Nizāmī Bansarī*, 68-69.

153 Simon Digby in the preface to, Nizāmuddīn Auliya and Ḥasan Dihlavī, *Morals for the Heart: Conversations of Shaykh Nizam Ad-Din Awliya Recorded by Amir Hasan Sijzi*, translated by Bruce B. Lawrence (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 1

shaykh as a newborn, from one *naẓar* of his guide.”<sup>154</sup> In mentioning some miracles associated with Mullā Shāh, Jahānārā Begum in the *Ṣāhibiyya* adds that, “the simplest of *Ḥaẓrat*’s miracles is that whatever lies in the conscience of a seeker he reveals it with one *naẓar*.”<sup>155</sup> She ends her treatise with ten disconnected couplets composed in praise of her guide. In the seventh couplet she says:

O Shāh! With one *naẓar* you have completed my work  
Bravo! With good focus you turned me into your beloved<sup>156</sup>

In order to fully comprehend the multivalent function of Muslim devotional images in early modern South Asia, one must delve deeply into the religious mindset that informs the various literary sources discussed in this chapter. An important branch of this literary output consists of the writings associated with many of the saints depicted in Indian paintings. When one looks into the sayings of the saints the deep significance of the notion of sacred viewing becomes much more clear. A key concept in sufi thought is the station known as *fanā*, which is understood as the extinction of the ego-self. Having achieved *fanā*, the saint becomes an empty vessel attracting divine grace and presence. It is only after reaching this station, in which the ego is broken, that the outward *naẓar* of the saint becomes a portal that links God with the seeker. Through this threshold of reciprocal viewing God acts via the vehicle of the saint, removing veils of ignorance from the hearts of seekers. A couplet written in gold atop an early eighteenth-century Mughal painting of the Shāh Jahān-era saint from Gujarat, Shāh Dawla, explains the paradox of a mortal human embodying divinity in these words (**Fig. 2.11**):

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<sup>154</sup> Dehlavī, *Akḥbār al-akhyār*, 70.

<sup>155</sup> Jahānārā Begum, *Risāla-i ṣāhibiyya*, 92.

<sup>156</sup> Jahānārā Begum, *Risāla-i ṣāhibiyya*, 109.

The state of the dervish should always be in affliction  
(same as) a house that is a broken ruin is filled with sunlight<sup>157</sup>

It is in this context that heretical sounding utterances of sufis appear to make claims to self-divinization. For example, Dārā Shikoh quotes the fifteenth-century Naqshbandī saint from Central Asia, Khwāja ‘Abdullah Aḥrār (d. 1490), “And Khwāja Aḥrār also said to his own people, ‘now while I am living, if you don’t see God, then when will you see Him?’ This means that anyone who looks at me with sincere devotion verily sees God.”<sup>158</sup> The saint, who has been represented in an early seventeenth-century Deccani painting, came to India with the Mughals and popularized his branch of Sufism in North India (**Fig. 2.12**).<sup>159</sup> In the *Ṣāhibiyya* Jahānārā provides a selection of quatrains from Mullā Shāh’s *Dīvān* that specifically highlight this paradox. In the verse below Mullā Shāh describes himself as a “devoted friend” while also appearing to make a claim for Godhood:

For twenty years we searched [for God]  
So we could outwardly acquire His perfume,  
We realized that the inquiry was a pursuit for oneself  
[and in that process] we found this secret: that we ourselves are He<sup>160</sup>

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157 I am grateful for Francesca Galloway for sharing the image.

158 Dārā Shikoh, *Ḥasanāt*, 48-49.

159 According to David Damrel, “a steady stream of Central Asian Naqshbandis who were spiritual and biological descendants of the famous Khwāja ‘ubaydullah Ahrar (d.1490) presented themselves at the Mughal court throughout Akbar’s reign and beyond.” David Damrel, “The Naqshbandi Reaction Reconsidered,” in *Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamicate South Asia* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2000), 187.

160 Jahānārā Begum, *Ṣāhibiyya*, 86.

In a *ghazal* from his collected *Muṣannifāt* the Mullā deals with this paradox in an even more subtle, ambiguous way, wrestling with this contradiction by stretching the very bounds of language:

If you are a *faqīr*, then one's speech becomes entirely God, Muṣṭafā  
 If you kill that *faqīr* then you kill God  
 O Shāh! If you say "I am the Truth," then the Truth is his  
 condition/state<sup>161</sup>  
 We do not die even if you kill us a hundred times<sup>162</sup>

For spiritual travelers like Jahānārā and Dārā Shikoh the quest for viewing a guide who was regarded as embodying divinity gained the utmost importance. At times, the *naẓar* of a living saint would be so sought after by disciples that the saint would intentionally hide his countenance behind a veil, magnifying the aura of his mystery and grandeur. One such figure was Shāh Madār (**Fig. 2.13**), a patron saint of acrobats and women who is represented profusely in paintings from Avadh. Dārā Shikoh explains that, "Shāh Madār at the end of his life, became veiled, and wouldn't show his face to anyone."<sup>163</sup> Shāh Muḥammad Dilrubā also went into seclusion. A member of the close circle of Mullā Shāh's *shaykh*, Miyān Mīr, Shāh Dilrubā appears to have been a major influence on Dārā Shikoh (**Fig. 3.12**).<sup>164</sup> The fact that Dārā considered him to be one of his guides explains the inclusion of his portrait in the *Late Shāh Jahān* album:

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161 As mentioned earlier, "I am the Truth" (*an al-Ḥaqq*) is the ecstatic utterance famously made by the sufi Al-Ḥallāj, thereby disclosing the great, paradoxical reality of the servant's union with God.

162 Mullā Shāh, *Muṣannifāt*, fol. 65b.

163 Dārā Shikoh, *Ḥasanāt*, 73.

164 For six letter written by Dārā Shikoh to Shāh Dilrubā see, British Library, *Fayyāz al-qawānīn*, manuscript Or 9617.

He is among my teachers, and in this age he is unique in spiritual poverty, *malāmat*, ascetic practices, abstention and seclusion.<sup>165</sup> Currently he is in seclusion, and shows his face to no one. Anyone who goes to him, he speaks to him through a screen. A few years ago he said to me that, “I don’t want to show my face to anyone.” I replied, “Looking at your face is a mercy for all creation.” He retorted, “I only want to show my countenance to someone who is a perfected gnostic, the world (which is lacking of such gnostics) doesn’t come to me for this reason. What do they wish to gain from looking at me?...

“... There is a secret within this hidden servant (of God),  
and if it were to be unveiled,  
Without doubt, the very face of the Lord would be revealed.”<sup>166</sup>

Dilrubā suggests that this secret is not for everyone to understand. Laymen with misguided devotional enthusiasm could easily confuse outward form for inner reality, resulting in idolatry. In the last two examples the concept of veiling or obscuring vision of the saint heightens the importance of the saint’s image in this context.<sup>167</sup> This maneuver also gives precedence to the inner/spiritual reality (*ma’nī*) over outer form (*ṣūrat*). The outer form is seen as a support that leads toward the inward, underlying meaning. Diverse colors are the qualities of a colorless essence. In Jahānārā Begum’s words:

All that I see is the manifestation of Truth  
The Essence (of God) is one, all I see are all the qualities (of the essence)  
The colorlessness of the beloved is subsistence for the imprint of  
extinction (creation)  
Become colorless, don’t give color any heed!<sup>168</sup>

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165 The *malāmatīs* take their name from the Arabic word *malāmah*, which means to attract blame upon oneself.

166 Dārā Shikoh, *Ḥasanāt*, 72-74.

167 “In the traditional symbolism of all three monotheistic faiths, the notion of a saint’s face that shines with light too powerful to be held by ordinary eyes and so must sometimes be veiled... can be traced to the Biblical description of Moses descending from Sinai.” Michael Barry, *Figurative Art in Medieval Islam*, 19.

168 Jahānārā Begum, *Risāla-i ṣāhibiyya*, 108.

For Jahānārā, as for the majority of sufi practitioners, the beatific outward forms of saints serve as portals that lead to the “essence” of God, which is one. In the final analysis, both color and colorlessness are two attributes of the same Beloved, two faces at once manifest and hidden. The aim of all *taṣavvuf*, then, is to journey from the colored-ness of the world to the colorlessness of God.<sup>169</sup>

## V. Conclusion

While many of the passages quoted in this chapter appear to challenge notions of religious orthodoxy, I have attempted to explain them in light of precedents found within Islamic tradition. With the exception of a small minority associated with the Qalandarī and Malāmatī paths, followers of Sufism considered themselves to be part of mainstream Islam. Dilrubā’s contemporaries would have easily understood his poetic utterance quoted above as a typically Muslim spiritual expression.

Seen in this light, the genre of sufi portraiture emerges as a medium intertwined with the preexisting *taḏkira* literature utilized for expressions of saint devotion. While the history of the *taḏkira* can be traced back to the formative period of Islam, the visualization of saints through painting required the suitable devotional climate of seventeenth-century India in order to flower. This ambiance supported a developed artistic culture steeped in the concepts of *darśan* and *naẓar*, as well as an enthusiastic network of patronage. Under the influence of Sufism as well as aspects of Indic spirituality, patronage patterns established during the time of Akbar grew, taking on a

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169 “a blue glass shows the sun as blue, a red glass as red, when the glass escapes from colour, it becomes white, it is more truthful than all other glasses and is the Imam.” Rumi, *Masnavi*, vol. I, trans. R.A. Nicholson, 152.

new meaning under the initiated sufi royals Jahānārā Begum and Dārā Shikoh. Moreover, the very saints who were the subjects of many of the portraits, and who were in open dialogue with Muslim nobility, were steeped in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s school of *Waḥdat al-wujūd*, a metaphysical perspective that further contextualized the increasingly devotional function of saints’ images.

Chapter Three will survey the representation of saints in Persian and Indian painting prior to the patronage of the royal siblings (circa 1500 – circa 1630), in order to identify the distinct motivations of previous patrons and examine how they differed from but in some cases foreshadowed the devotional interests of Jahānārā and Dārā. This survey will include a more general discussion of the development of a visual devotional language, outlining major themes. As we shall see, some elements introduced during the Akbar period were continuations of earlier Persian models while other developments were unique to South Asia. The chapter is divided into three major themes of devotion, all linked in one way or the other to the Mughal court.



## CHAPTER 3:

### *The Jōgī, the Qalandar and the Faqīr:*

#### **Muslim Saints in Indian Painting, circa 1500-1640**

*Although we have the business of kingship before us, every moment we think more and more on the dervishes. If the heart of our Dervish be gladdened by us we count that to be the profit of our kingship.*

(Emperor Jahāngīr)<sup>170</sup>

### **Introduction**

This chapter aims to explore the many ways in which images of saints accumulated meaning over time. For instance, the repeated scenes of yogis and ascetics in caves that were originally developed to support texts in manuscripts continued to carry their initial significance while accruing new connotations indicative of subtle shifts in patrons' aspirations (**Fig. 3.1**).<sup>171</sup> As I will discuss in this chapter, artists working for Akbar, Jahāngīr and Shāh Jahān continued utilizing devotional themes established in the medieval period, both to perpetuate deeply rooted princely values and to forge new personae for their patrons.

In his article on Dārā Shikoh's literary interaction with Hindu thought, Munis Faruqi "lays out a historical context for the study of other religious traditions by Muslims" to show that Dārā Shikoh, rather than being an anomaly, was in fact very much

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<sup>170</sup> Okada, *Indian Miniatures of the Mughal Court*, 42.

<sup>171</sup> For a detailed discussion on this theme in Indian painting see Gregory Minissale, *Images of Thought*, 137-141. For a comprehensive study on the symbolism of the cave in Persian painting see Michael Barry, *Figurative Art in Medieval Islam*, 253-383.

in dialogue with a continuum of Indo-Muslim beliefs and intellectual pursuits.<sup>172</sup>

Building on this observation, in the current chapter I will discuss three distinct themes of Muslim devotionism in Indian painting from the early-sixteenth century to the first half of the seventeenth century that directly influenced the aesthetic, cultural and religious formation of Dārā Shikoh. Rather than imagining the prince as an “unorthodox” oddity in Mughal imperial history, as most modern scholarship tends to do, my aim is to show how Dārā Shikoh and other Mughal elites received moral and religious instruction through visual and literary tropes transmitted by arts of the book.

The first section of this chapter focuses on the presence of the Nāth yogi and his function as both emblem and surrogate for the spiritual path of *taṣavvuf*. I will discuss how the yogi acts as a metonym for Sufism, as an archetype for the mystical traveler (*sālik*) in fifteenth and sixteenth-century sufi romances, and as a figure of aspiration in the *Salīm Album* (circa 1599–1604)—a project undertaken by Prince Salīm (the future Emperor Jahāngīr) during his rebellion years in Allahabad. In Chapter Four I will show how the image of the yogi became an important spiritual model for Dārā Shikoh.

The second part of the current chapter highlights the enigmatic role of a specific, unruly branch of sufis known as the Qalandars. Often labeled as “heterodox” and considered as a marginal group, their ubiquitous presence in Mughal and Mughal-influenced paintings places them curiously at the forefront of the Indo-Muslim religious and cultural imagination. I will cite examples from the Akbar and early Jahāngīr periods to show the influence of this group on the spiritual development of the teenage Dārā Shikoh.

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172 Munis Faruqi, “Dara Shukoh, Vedanta, and Imperial Succession in Mughal India,” in *Religious Interactions in Mughal India*, ed. Vasudha Dalmia and Munis Faruqi (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), 33.

The final section will discuss the role of influential *awliyā'* in Akbar, Jahāngīr and Shāh Jahān-period paintings. While acknowledging that images of saints were indeed incorporated into Mughal albums and manuscripts as metaphorical devices for conferring divine authority onto earthly kings, I will also argue for a more nuanced reading in which multiple meanings coexist within a single painting. Of particular interest is the example of the esoteric prophet Khizr, a semi-legendary figure who was depicted as a multivalent link between heavenly authority, sufi association and worldly power in Jahāngīri and Shāh Jahāni albums.

Rather than taking on the nearly impossible task of compiling an exhaustive list of known representations of saints made prior to 1640—the year of Jahānārā and Dārā's initiation—I have preferred to highlight prevalent themes and motivations by presenting central examples that almost certainly contributed to the siblings' cultural formation. The artworks included reflect the core values of the courtly devotional culture that flowered in Mughal India. In order to present a more holistic view, these images are discussed here in relation to the literature that they either accompanied or illustrated.

## **I. The Sufi in the Garb of a Jōgī: Visual and Literary Articulations of Sanctity**

### **from the *Chandāyan* to the *Salīm Album***

*Separated from my Beloved, I have become a jōgī,  
For that dear one I have become a jōgī*

(from the *Salīm Album*)

The presence of the yogi and the yogini in paintings made for Muslim patrons with a specifically Islamic agenda is a ubiquitous theme that has received almost no

attention in the context of art historical scholarship. The practice of incorporating images of the yogi ascetic (called a jōgī in the Persianate world) into the iconography of Muslim devotionism provides a unique window into larger networks of Hindu-Muslim interaction that persisted and changed over time.

By examining the continuity of this theme over a wide temporal expanse, I intend to question the modern periodization of South Asian histories, while suggesting a shifting of temporal boundaries. Typically, scholars divide the period that I am focusing on into two phases: the “Sultanate Period” (1206-1526) and the “Mughal Period” (1526-1857), named after major ruling dynasties of greater North India. The Sultanate period falls roughly within what is commonly understood to be the medieval phase, while the Mughal era spans what is often labeled as the early modern period. When cultural expression is viewed through the division of dynastic time, history is imagined as a series of interruptions. By using a thematic lens that studies the persistence of iconography across time and period I suggest a more nuanced view of history framed in terms of continuity, coalescence and accumulation.

Since the medieval period sufis have freely traversed diverse social strata and inhabited multivalent communal roles. Composers of romances, such as Amīr Khusro (d.1325), Mullā Dā’ūd (active fourteenth century) and Qutban (active early sixteenth century) were representatives of imperial courts as well as sufi orders. Aditya Behl has brilliantly shown in his work on the sufi tales *Madhumālatī* and *Mrigāvatī* how Sultanate-period epic romances written in local *Hindavī* languages simultaneously functioned as morality tales, performances for court and public entertainment, and, perhaps most intriguingly, as provocative, yet deeply allegorical instructional manuals written by sufi

guides for their acolytes.<sup>173</sup> In all of the major epics, beginning with the Chishtī Sufi Mullā Dāʿūd’s *Chandāyan* (completed in 1379), the location is a mythic, pre-Islamic India. It is against this backdrop that the protagonist, often portrayed as a male *Kṣatriya rāja putra* (prince), falls in love with a beautiful princess. In these “hero’s quest” stories the lovers are parted after a brief and unfulfilled initial union, leaving the hero distraught and in desperate search of his lost beloved. No one seems to know the way to the princess’s city—except for the jōgī.

Medieval sufi romances (*prema-kahānīs*, or love stories) such as the *Chandāyan* were often derived from indigenous folk tales.<sup>174</sup> Sultanate-period sufi authors who were first and foremost writing for a Muslim audience reworked and modified Indic narratives by charging them with Islamic symbolism, rather than inserting incongruous characters from their own time and milieu. In the *Chandāyan* the figure of the beautiful princess Chandā signifies the divine beloved. The narrative opens with a long ode to the city of Govar where she was born.<sup>175</sup> Govar is implicitly understood to be paradise, the Qur’ānic *jannat*. The fruits and gardens of the city are in fact the Qur’ānic fruits of paradise as reflected in the bounty of South Asia. Similarly, the Qur’ānic vision of *jannat* populated with the *muqarrabūn* (those people who God brings near to Him, often understood within sufi thought as the saints) is reimagined as the *but khāna*, or temple complex. The section

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173 Aditya Behl, Simon Weightman, and Manjhan, *Madhumalati An Indian Sufi Romance* (Oxford: OUP Oxford, 2001); and, Aditya Behl, Wendy Doniger and Suhravardī, *The Magic Doe, Qutbban Suhravardī’s Mirigāvatī: a New Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). For a detailed study on the *Chandāyana* see, Qamar Adamjee, “Strategies for Visual Narration in the Illustrated *Chandāyan* Manuscript,” Ph.D diss., New York University, 2011, ProQuest LLC (3482848).

174 “(T)he principal storyline of the *Chandāyan* derives from the popular folk-lore and oral tradition of the Ahir community, a Hindu cow-herding class of north and central India,” Adamjee, “Strategies for Visual Narration,” 50.

175 The dispersed texts and fragments of the *Chandāyan* were collated and translated into Urdu by Muhammad Anṣārullah. For the description of the city of Govar see, Muhammad Anṣārullah, *Chandāyan* (Patna: Idara-I Tahqiqat-I Urdu, 1996), 52–62.

of the narrative titled “The Description of the Temple Complex Next to the Tank, and the Resident Men and Women Jōgīs,” is a symbolic representation of the perfect sufi lodge (*khānqāh*) as well as paradise. Moreover, the jōgī and *āshram*, replete with a central pool, singing birds and fruits from all seasons, signify the ideal community, the archetypal *insān-al kāmīl*, and his or her paradisaal inner state.<sup>176</sup>

**Figure 3.2** is an illustration from the Lahore-Chandigarh *Chandāyan* manuscript that depicts the very chapter describing the temple complex.<sup>177</sup> In the folio, painted in what is known as the *Chaurapañcāśika* Group Style (CPS, circa first half of the sixteenth century), the figure of the poet-saint Mullā Da’ūd is shown narrating his own tale to a disciple or a courtier in a chamber with a red background, with black prayer beads hanging from his right arm.<sup>178</sup> The jutting trefoil-arched building, in which the two figures sit around an open book, is inserted into the right corner of the bottom register and connects the two main sections of the page. The composition of the entire page is a balance between red and blue, two primary hues that often signify the two aspects of God: *jalāl* and *jamāl* (rigor and mercy).<sup>179</sup> In the center of the top register is a courtyard with a temple and tank. A double storied monastery with meditation chambers surrounds

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176 “Sufi shaikhs...wrote romances in Hindavī that describe the ascetic quest of the hero towards the revelatory beauty of a heroine (or God) by linking mortification, fasting, and prayer with a female object of desire. Drawing on the local language of ascetic practice, they made their hero into a yogi, while the heroine is a beautiful Indian woman.” Behl and Wightman, *Madhumālatī*, xiii.

177 For another discussion of this folio see, Adamjee, “Strategies for Visual Narration,” 116-117, pl. 2.36.

178 For a detailed discussion of the CPS style of painting see Ziyā’ al-Dīn Nakshabī and Pramod Chandra, *Ṭūfī-nāma = Tales of a parrot: complete colour facsimile edition in original size of the manuscript in possession of the Cleveland Museum of Art = Das Papageienbuch : vollständige Faksimile-Ausgabe im Originalformat der Handschrift aus dem Besitz des Cleveland Museum of Art* (Graz: Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt, 1976), 31–48, 161–164; and Sonya Rhie Quintanilla, “The Chandayana and Early Mughal Painting,” in *Themes, Histories, Interpretations: Essays in Honour of B.N. Goswamy*, ed. Padma Kaimal (Ahmedabad: Published by Mapin Publishers in association with Osianama.com, 2013), 105–124.

179 For a detailed study on the symbolism of color in Islam see, Martin Lings, *Symbol & Archetype: A Study of the Meaning of Existence*, (Louisville (KY): Fons Vitae, 2006), chapter 3.

the courtyard. On the second floor of the building jōginīs can be seen chanting mantras with prayer beads. The bottom register is a flat expanse of blue punctuated by three distinct types of jōgīs: lean, ash-smeared ascetics; ascetics wearing the patched garb more commonly associated with wandering sufis; and naked jōgīs with loincloths (**Fig. 3.3**). Without corresponding to them exactly, the jōgīs stand in for the three types mentioned in the text—the *khūna*, *tapassī* and *bhagwant* jōgīs.<sup>180</sup> More importantly, the image provides a vignette into an early modern Śaiva *āshram*. Thus, while performing a literal illustrative function, the folio also offers a relatable context for a contemporary sixteenth-century audience. The large earrings—which after the eighteenth century gave the Nāth jōgīs the pejorative epithet *kānphaṭā*, or split-eared—and the small black deer horns on threads, known as *śingīs*, around the necks of all the holy men suggest that they are followers of Gorakṣa, or Gorakhnāth.<sup>181</sup> Nāth jōgīs were similar to other communities of Indic mystics in that they believed in a formless, unconditioned (*nirguṇa*) Godhead. Many sufis entering the Subcontinent from western Islamic lands saw this as synonymous with the Islamic conception of an absolute (*muṭlaq*), transcendent (*munazzah*) God.<sup>182</sup> For this reason sufis in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries readily mingled with jōgīs, sharing practices and ideas freely.<sup>183</sup> As James Mallinson has explained, “This theological

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180 Anṣārullāh, *Candāyan*, 53. I haven’t been able to find any information on the *Khūna* yogis. The *tapassī* are those who perform acts of extreme asceticism and self-mortification. *Bhagwant* could refer to followers of a *saguna* god (personal deity), such as the majority of Vaiṣṇava devotees of Rama and Krishna.

181 Gorakhnāth, a figure shrouded in legend, is believed to be an eleventh-century Śaiva master yogi who is commonly regarded as the founder of the Nāth yogis, an order that focuses on the spiritual discipline of Hātha Yoga.

182 “In the Panjab, in the Himālayas, in Bombay, and elsewhere they [Gorakhnāthīs] are called *Nāth*, which is a general term meaning ‘master.’” See, George Weston Briggs, *Gorakhnath and the Kanphata Yogis* (Calcutta: 1938; reprint ed., Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1980), 1.

183 It needs to be clarified that this particular aspect of yogis was not the only mode of reception for a Muslim audience. In many fantasy tales such as the *Hamzanama* and the *Kathasartisaagara* (Ocean of Rivers of Stories)—both illustrated for Akbar—tantric yogis are identified as wizards accruing boundless

openness—which manifested in, among other things, a disdain for the purity laws adhered to by more orthodox Hindu ascetics—allowed them to mix freely with those such as the Muslim(s).”<sup>184</sup>

In the sixteenth-century Lahore-Chandigarh *Chandāyan* folio the garb that is shared by both sufis and jōgīs includes the patched cloak (*muraqqa*’, which means both an album and an ascetic garment); the animal skin rug on which the naked figure on the top left of the lower register is shown sitting while blowing a long horn; iron bangles and large earrings. Curiously, a companion dog is also present. In fact, but for his *siṅgī* necklace and topknot, the figure with the large white dog entering the page at the bottom of the lower register, followed by two younger jōgīs, could almost be mistaken for a dervish, with a long wispy beard, bangles and a bulky patched cloak (compare **Figs. 3.3** and **3.23**). As I will discuss later in this chapter, the dog motif is a recurring theme in both Persian devotional poetry and in early Mughal painting. With these shared characteristics, the jōgīs shown congregating in the *āshram* are interchangeable with Muslim holy men. They are participants in a shared South Asian devotional world inhabited by Nāths, Vaiśnava *sants* and sufis who all shared a common notion of divinity: namely, a *nirguṇa* or *muṭlaq* deity. In Carl Ernst’s words, *prema-kahānīs* such as the *Chandāyan*, and their corresponding images “point to a concept of the world in which...the fixed religious boundaries of today...were not even conceivable.”<sup>185</sup>

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power. They are seen as fear-inducing, wild sorcerers with access to formidable magic. For a detailed discussion see, Debra Diamond, and Molly Emma Aitken, et al. *Yoga: the Art of Transformation*, 202-209.

184 James Mallinson, “Yogic Identities: Tradition and Transformation,” <https://www.freersackler.si.edu/essays/yogic-identities-tradition-and-transformation/#footnote24>. Mallinson also points out that the Persianate term “jōgī” could be used to refer to ascetics from a variety of traditions, but usually was designated for Nāth yogis.

185 Carl W. Ernst, “Two Versions of a Persian Text on Yoga and Cosmology, Attributed to Shaykh Mu‘īn



Having established the interchangeability of the jōgī with the sufi, we can now look at the jōgī's role in epic romances. In most South Asian narratives there are characters that act as guides or intermediaries between the beloved and the heartbroken lover. In Indic romances it is often the *sakhī* (confidant) of Radha who carries messages from Krishna.<sup>186</sup> In the *Chandāyan*, a jōgī, named Bājir plays the role of mediator between the heavenly beloved and the earthly seeker.<sup>187</sup> As the story goes, Bājir providentially chances upon a glimpse of Chandā while wandering door to door asking for alms and singing songs of separation. The jōgī in the street glimpses her just as she opens her balcony window, poking her head out. Upon seeing her “it was as if he found a new life,” and he falls unconscious.<sup>188</sup> The scene is a symbolic enactment of the yogic moment of *mokṣa* (liberation from the ego) and the sufi concept of *fanā* (spiritual extinction), most famously depicted in the Qur’ānic anecdote of Moses’s encounter with God.<sup>189</sup> It is the moment when, in *taṣavvuf*, the traveler (*sālik*) finds “a new life” as a *valī*, an intimate friend of God. Not only does the jōgī Bājir stand in for the *valī*, he also represents the ideal ascetic who holds the key to the mystery of God-knowledge (‘*irfān*).

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al-Dīn Chishtī,” *Elixir* 2 (2006): 69–76. 70.

186 It is important to note that in most Indic tales the soul is identified as a young woman while the divine is in the form of an idealized male: as in Rādhā and Krishna. In Arabic and most Persianate traditions the roles are reversed, as seen most famously in the story of Laylā and Majnūn. In the South Asian medieval Sufi romances the Perso-Arabic convention of gendering is continued. Similarly, a literary convention that also follows a Persianate format in all the epics is the panegyric opening section, which is based on the Persian *mathnavī* or verse romance. In Behl’s words, “The generic model that Mawlānā Dā’ūd created in the *Candāyan* is a composite one, and one which can best be seen as the textual record of the historical interaction of the Chishtī Sufis with Sanskrit, Persian and regional religious and literary traditions.” Behl and Weightman, *Madhumālātī*, xv. Most importantly, both traditions use the metaphor – earthly for divine.

187 Qamar Adamjee, in her dissertation on the *Chandāyan* considers *bājir* to be a wandering minstrel. See, Adamjee, “Strategies for Visual Narration,” 178. Anṣārullah translates the word *Bājir* as jōgī, and explains that *Bājirs* were a type of yogis. See, Anṣārullah, *Candāyan*, 80, f.n. 1.

188 Anṣārullah, *Chandāyan*, 80.

189 “And when his Lord revealed (His) glory to the mountain He sent it crashing down. And Moses fell down senseless. And when he woke he said: Glory unto Thee!” (Qur’ān, 7:143).

After the encounter, Bājir arrives at the neighboring kingdom where its ruler, Rūpchand, hears his love songs describing Chandā's beauty. Following the traditional literary conventions of the *sarāpā* (the Persianate head-to-toe description of the beloved also known as the *nakh-sikh* in Sanskrit), the 21 verses praising Chandā's beauty were regularly illustrated in regional workshops during the first half of the sixteenth century. In a Lahore-Chandigarh folio (**Fig. 3.4**) the jōgī can be seen sitting cross-legged on a leopard skin opposite the enthroned Rūpchand.<sup>190</sup> He is shown in the typical gesture of narrating with his right hand, which is resting on a meditation crutch (**Fig. 3.5**). Similar to the Nāth jōgīs from the temple complex, he has a *śiṅgī* necklace, a topknot and large white earrings. In a page from the Mumbai *Chandāyan*, another sixteenth-century manuscript depicting the same story, the orange-skinned ascetic is once again shown seated on a leopard skin narrating the heroine's beauty to a swooning Rūpchand (**Fig. 3.6**). Falling in love with Chandā after hearing Bājir's description of her, the king vows to attack Govar and capture the beauty.<sup>191</sup>

The jōgī plays a central role in another Hindavī *prema-kahānī*, the *Mṛigāvatī*, composed in 1503 by Quṭban, a *shaykh* of the Suhraṇavardī sufi order. The story, which involves the protagonist Rājkuṇwar's quest for finding his beloved, the shape-shifting doe-woman Mṛigāvatī, is crucial for understanding the visual and literary transmission of the jōgī into the early Mughal cultural consciousness: particularly in the case of Prince

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190 Also see, Adamjee, "Strategies for Visual Narration," 181, pl.4.2.

191 The famous warrior Lōrak is chosen for the task. Needless to say, as soon as Lōrak sees Chandā for himself he falls in love with her, and they both elope, escaping the city of Govar—where the beauty has been married against her will to a lame, impotent dotard—as well as the desirous clutches of Rūpchand. Thus begins the story of Lōrak and Chandā.

Salīm, the future emperor Jahāngīr.<sup>192</sup> The story was translated from the original Hindavī into Persian as the *Tale of Rājkuṇwar*, and lavishly illustrated for the prince in 1603/4 during his rebellion years in Allahabad (1600-1604).<sup>193</sup>

The romance revolves around Rājkuṇwar's seven-tier quest to find the doe-princess after an initial unfulfilled union, in which the princess admonishes him for not understanding the true meaning of *prema-rasa*, the essence of real love. The epic is understood as an allegory for the inner journey in which the traveler-prince, who represents the spiritual seeker, has to dominate his carnal soul (*nafs al-ammāra*) through ascetic practices while gaining nearness to God through the sufi methods of remembrance (*zikr*).<sup>194</sup> The underlying moral of the story is that union with the Beloved is not something that can be demanded or forcefully obtained (as Rājkuṇwar attempts in the first part of the tale), but is instead a state of being that must be arrived at through severe ascetical practices (*zuhud*) and trust in the remembrance of God (*tavakkul*). After Mṛigāvatī chastises the prince and flees from his palace he embarks on his long adventure by first donning the garb of a wandering jōgī.<sup>195</sup>

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192 It is very clear from the *Bāburnāma* that the Mughals from the very beginning of their presence in India were interested in interacting with jōgīs. Although Bābur himself was disappointed by his visit to Gurkhattī, a *Nāth maṭh* (a cloister or monastery) near Peshawar, Akbar period illustrations to the text reimagine the royal visit as populated with jōgīs, thereby reflecting Akbar's own enthusiasm for Indic knowledge. See folio 22b from the *Bāburnāma*, Walters Art Museum, W.596. For a discussion of the folio see, Debra Diamond, and Molly Emma Aitken, et al. *Yoga: the Art of Transformation*, 180-181, 184: fig. 14d.

193 There is one known illustrated pre-Akbar period copy of the *Mṛigāvatī* in the collection of Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras. See, Karl Khandalavala, "The *Mṛigavat* of Bharat Kala Bhavan: as a Social Document and its Date and Provenance," Chhavi 1/Golden Jubilee Volume: 19–36.

194 Aditya Behl, Wendy Doniger and Suhravardī, *The Magic Doe*, 12–14.

195 According to Aditya Behl, "The yogic disguise marks the indigenization of the Muslim Sufis, for they here expressed their distinctive agenda in an Indic language, in terms and language taken from local religious adepts... the Sufi poets of the romances use much of the symbolism and imagery of the Gorakhnāth *panth* in the elaboration of the quest of the seeker, who has always to assume the guise of a yogi to attain the divine beloved, his object." Aditya Behl, Wendy Doniger and Suhravardī, *The Magic Doe*, 12–13.

In the story the distraught prince takes on the accouterments of the Nāth jōgīs, including the *jatta* topknot, the *rudrākṣa* rosary, the jōgī stick, the begging bowl and the animal skin used for meditation. However, it is only when he meets his guide, a senior wandering jōgī who has seen the city of his beloved that his journey truly begins. Upon meeting him, “he ran to fall at the ascetic’s feet. ‘Show me that fortunate, blessed path!’<sup>196</sup> As we shall see below, the act of submission before a spiritual authority is a key literary and historical trope that was regularly enacted by Persian and Indian royalty.

In the illustrations of the Chester Beatty Library manuscript made for Prince Salīm, numerous artists who contributed to the paintings have shown Rājkuṇwar as a Nāth jōgī in different ways. In folio 23v (**Fig. 3.7**) he can be seen with matted hair and prayer beads around his neck, wearing wooden clogs and the stitched robe shared by sufis and jōgīs.<sup>197</sup> He is also carrying a *vīna* to indicate that he has become a wandering jōgī minstrel, singing laments of love and separation. He is shown leaving his father’s kingdom, the distant hilltop city, which is separated from him compositionally by the large *pīpal* tree that breaks through the top border of the painting. As it winds its way out of the picture plane the sacred tree simultaneously reflects the prince’s spiritual aspirations and acts as a marker dividing his worldly attachments, symbolized by the city on the top right, from the ascetic path that he is shown walking on.

It is important to point out that the mainstream sufi *Weltanschauung* differs from the renunciate perspective of most Śaiva jōgīs in one key aspect. For the sufis following the Prophetic model of the “philosopher-king,” the central intention of the spiritual path

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196 Aditya Behl, Wendy Doniger and Suhravardī, *The Magic Doe*, 84. See also, Leach, *Mughal and Other Indian Paintings*, vol. I, 201, 208, fig. 2.55.

197 Linda Leach, *Mughal and Other Indian Paintings*, 206. For a discussion on this folio see Debra Diamond, and Molly Emma Aitken, et al. *Yoga: the Art of Transformation*, 206-210, fig. 17e.

is to balance inward detachment with worldly responsibility. These are the stages of *fanā*, extinction in the divine beloved, followed by *baqā*, subsistence in the world through God. In the sufi epic romances, after the prince has united with his beloved in her city of gold he eventually has to return and assume leadership of his own kingdom. Striking the ideal balance between the spiritual realm and the world is represented through the protagonist's efforts to care for and placate two wives whom he must convince to live together in harmony. In folio 23v these two aspects, the heavenly and the worldly, are clearly shown on either side of the *pīpal* tree. On the top left of the folio is a white-domed temple or shrine under the shade of two towering palms, while on the right is the already mentioned city of the prince.

In the same image, a pair of ducks in a lotus pond, two foxes outside their craggy furrow and, most noticeably, a pair of deer next to a flowing stream, all offer the viewer a foretaste of the eventual union between Rājkuṇwar and Mṛigāvatī. These visual details enhance the literary narrative's "impulse toward consummation through a series of episodes that delay the satisfaction of desire."<sup>198</sup> This would have been clear to the painting's original receivers as the artist relies on familiar painterly conventions that were shared by the larger Persianate world but localized during the Akbar period. The distant city—a motif established in the Akbar atelier—the paired animals, the stream and the animated tree of life are all markers that are freely used in illustrating sufi devotional literature in the medieval and early modern periods across what Shahab Ahmed has described as the "Balkans-to-Bengal-complex."<sup>199</sup> In **Figure 3.8**, for example, which is

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198 Aditya Behl, Wendy Doniger and Suhraṇḍī, *The Magic Doe*, 10.

199 The motif of the receding background with the distant city is really an Akbar-period convention, inspired by Renaissance paintings and prints that had become available during the second half of his reign.

an Akbar-period illustration of Nizāmī's (1141–1209) *Khamseh*, the tree—in this instance the more Persianate plane tree—occupies exactly the same compositional space as the tree in the Rājkuṇwar folio. The paired animals gathering around the tree of life, the flowing stream—which refers to the fountain of life—and the city disappearing into the distance are all shared symbols that move freely across geographies and narratives, transporting any given image into an ontological space. They are thus evidence of a shared Muslim cultural imagination in the medieval and early modern periods.<sup>200</sup>

The painting immediately following folio 23v shows the first place that the jōgī prince passes through on his journey. In that kingdom the ruler is so moved by his song that he attempts to persuade him to stay, offering him wealth and a beautiful wife (**Fig. 3.9**). In this image the semi-naked jōgī prince is shown in a typically Indic convention: seated under the shade of a tall, slender tree, on a naturally raised platform, next to a large lotus tank.<sup>201</sup> Deep in discussion with the coaxing king he wears a leopard skin draped over his right shoulder. The skin's use as attire is common to both sufis and jōgīs. In **Figure 3.10**, Emperor Akbar's chief court artist 'Abd al-Ṣamad has shown a typical wandering mendicant approaching the young king.<sup>202</sup> The dervish, who carries a horn similar to those of the jōgīs from the *Chandāyan* folio and wears comparable earrings and bangles, also has a leopard skin clasped around him like a cape. It should be reiterated that paintings such as these echo one another because they accurately portray the garb

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200 "(T)raditional Islamic culture no more intended to separate its 'secular' and 'religious' domains than did the other great sacral civilizations of the past... where every painted or graven image was made to carry a telling allusion to this or that given aspect of holy order of being." Michael Barry, *Figurative Art in Medieval Islam*, 134. See also page 380 for a discussion of the symbols.

201 Linda Leach, *Mughal and Other Indian Paintings from the Chester Beatty Library*, vol. 1, 201, 207, fig. 2.54.

202 For another discussion of this painting see, Sheila Canby, *Princes, Poets and Paladins: Islamic and Indian Painting from the Collection of Prince and Princess Sadruddin Aga Khan* (London: British Museum, 1998), 110–111.

and everyday practices of ascetics in medieval and early modern South Asia, Central Asia and Persia. Seventeenth-century images of one of Dārā Shikoh's spiritual guides, Shāh Dilrubā of the Qādirī sufi order, always show him wearing a leopard-skin cap and tunic (**Fig. 3.11**). Just as sitting on an animal-skin rug signifies the ascetic's ability to dominate his or her carnal soul, the leopard attire also suggests that the ascetic has imbibed the solar qualities of the animal as a sign of intimacy with God.<sup>203</sup>

The aforementioned scene depicting Rājkuṇwar in conversation with the neighboring king (**Fig. 3.9**) offers insight into another Indo-Persian narrative convention connected to the representation of jōgīs: depictions of the contrasting spheres of the jōgī and the imperial retinue. In the background of the Rājkuṇwar painting, the king's palace is once again shown separated from the foreground by water, in this instance a surrounding moat with a bridge. In the farthest distance is a high hilltop capped with a shrine or temple, alluding to the ultimate, as yet unfulfilled, goal of the jōgī prince. In the middle foreground the jōgī and king converse, cordoned off by the imperial retinue. Although regularly featured in Persian and Mughal paintings depicting royalty, scholars have tended to neglect the symbolic significance of this retinue. Michael Barry, drawing extensively from literary parallels, has convincingly argued for a deeper reading of the king's entourage, which frequently includes courtiers, banner bearers and royal horses. Citing from a treatise by Ibn Ṭufayl<sup>204</sup> a twelfth-century philosopher and follower of Ibn Sīnā whose writings helped to disseminate his cosmology across the Islamic world. Barry demonstrates how the horse symbolizes the prince or king's physical body, which needs to be tethered or reined-in through domination by higher reasoning. The courtiers holding

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203 One of the most popular epithets of 'Ali, the prince of saints, is "the lion of God".

204 *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzan*, which Michale Barry mistakenly quotes as a work by Avicenna.

the king's weapons represent other faculties such as wrath, lust and extravagance, which run amok when unbridled but can be rewarding when controlled. As Ibn Ṭufayl explains, “since until such exile [life on earth], you shall never be quit of them, you must curb them under your grip and overrule them with your authority.”<sup>205</sup> The king's retinue in the foreground and his palace in the background therefore represent the corporeal realm, whereas Rājkuṇwar—as the archetypal jōgī seated under a sacred tree on a raised platform—defines the otherworldly precinct of the spirit.

One of the great genre-defining paintings from Herat (**Fig. 3.12**), made in 1494/95 by Kamāl al-Dīn Behzād (circa 1450-1535), the legendary master of the late Timurid and early Safavid courts, illustrates an anecdote from Nizāmī Ganjavī's twelfth-century *Iskandar-nāma* (*Story of Alexander*). In the British Library manuscript folio, the kingly figure of Alexander, shown in a green tunic kneeling before a gnostic (‘*ārīf*), is based—like so many early modern illustrations of devotional epics—on the patron himself: in this instance the Timurid ruler, Sultan Ḥusayn Mirzā Bayqarā (1438-1506). The holy man, described by Nizāmī as an Indian ascetic living near the Indus River, sits before a cave in the wilderness of the mountains. Alexander has come to petition the ascetic's prayer for success as he prepares to attack the city shown in the background of the painting, bedecked with web-like brickwork and soldiers scurrying visibly on its ramparts. The sage is shaded by the familiar autumnal plane tree from which a stream—once again representing the fountain of life—can be seen flowing downward toward a guard holding a lantern. In Qur'ānic terms the fountain or stream refers to the place where Moses met Khizr, the evergreen prophet who leads souls to the waters of

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205 Michael Barry, *Figurative Art in Islam*, 301. Also see, Ibn Tufayl, *Ibn Tufayl's Hayy Ibn Yaqzan: A Philosophical Tale*, translated by Lenn Goodman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).



immortality. The fountain of life also refers to the place where the sweet sea of the afterlife meets the salt sea of this world, and is thus known as “the meeting place of the two oceans,” the *majma’ al-baḥrayn* (Qur’ān, 18: 60-82). Similarly, the threshold of the cave symbolizes the liminal space here occupied by the saint.<sup>206</sup> The cave itself simultaneously recalls the place where the Prophet Muḥammad went for his spiritual retreats and received the first Qur’ānic revelation, as well as the *ghayb*, the Unknown or Beyond-Being womb chamber where the lower soul and body are left behind and the secret of God’s hidden mystery is revealed to the mystic. The practice of making spiritual retreats in caves is another phenomenon found across the Mediterranean, the Middle East and South Asia.<sup>207</sup>

In Behzād’s reimagining of the literary and historical theme of rulers visiting ascetics in the wilderness the king’s corporeal faculties are not only held in check but are depicted literally behind him: the horse is shown reined in by the groom holding the bridle; the archer, who looks away from the saint, has his arrows safely in the quiver; and the king’s sword is sheathed in the page’s hand. None of the retinue, including the king’s own horse, are allowed to enter the hallowed vicinity of the saint’s cave. The message of the painting is that the emperor must leave behind his worldly emblems of power in order to humble himself before a spiritual authority.

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206 Every realized saint in Islam is thought to have an aspect of Khizr, since sanctity is synonymous with immortality: the only means of attaining union with God is through extinguishing the lower self. True knowledge of God is beyond time and space, and thus through the very act of participating in God-knowledge the saint becomes ever living.

207 For a detailed analysis on the symbolism of the cave and its use in Persian painting see, Michael Barry, “Alexander’s Cave,” in *Figurative Art in Medieval Islam*, 253–384. The use of the cave symbolism also coincides with its use in Neo-Platonism, whose language was readily accepted and incorporated into medieval Islamic philosophy and speculative Sufism.

A similar attitude is repeated in the *Mṛigāvatī* anecdote illustrated in the folio in **Figure 3.9**. Even though these symbols are unrelated to the textual narrative of the particular passage in which the uninitiated prince does not yet embody the *insān al-kāmil*, and the king shown in the image only appears briefly, primarily to introduce Rājkuṇṇwar to his jōgī-guide, it is nonetheless important to point them out in order to reveal the repeated use of symbols that were deeply rooted in the Indo-Persian cultural imagination. The insertion of these emblematic narrative symbols helped inculcate princely ideals in the very princes who were the patrons of these elite manuscripts. It was thus that romances primarily written by sufis for spiritual instruction also acted as morality tales, educating young patrons in courtly comportment and etiquette, while at the same time instilling a sense of religious hierarchy in which the gnostic of God (the '*ārif bi'Llah*')—owing to his spiritual independence from social hierarchies—was believed to hold the highest status.<sup>208</sup>

The artist Govardhan's painting of *Jahāngīr visiting Jadrūp* (circa 1620), from the Musée Guimet, is an historical reflection of precisely this timeless convention in which a worldly king submits, almost ritually, to a king of the spiritual realm (**Fig. 3.13**).<sup>209</sup> The artist carefully divided his depiction of this actual historical event into two distinct

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208 Nizāmī uses the same theme earlier in the *Khamseh* by placing the dervish-like Majnūn, Laylā's lover, in a cave where he lives with the wild beasts. Majnūn's uncle, upon seeing his spiritual state in the cave remembers a tale about a dervish who was visited by a king in the Arabian Desert. Upon seeing him the king said, "The dervish is a wise man, and he is superior even to me. He knows well the worth of what he has and is satisfied." *Then the king went into the hut and kissed the dervish's feet* (italics are mine). See, Peter J. Chekowski, *Mirror of the Invisible World: Tales from the Khamseh of Nizami* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1975), 63. The *nasīhatnāme* (advice to princes) tradition in epic as well as romantic texts was also extremely popular in the Ottoman world, which was very much part of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex. I am grateful to Amanda Phillips for pointing out this connection.

209 See, Amina Okada, *Indian Miniatures of the Mughal Court* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1992), 39, 40, fig. 40. For a slightly earlier Jahangir period example a prince visiting a saint see the border decoration from a *Berlin Album* folio in the Staatsbibliothek, Berlin (ca. 1610), in which Prince Salīm pays a visit to Shaykh Salīm, the saint who famously prayed for Akbar to have a male heir (Ms. 117, fol. 22a).

registers. The world below bears the insignia of worldly power: the golden parasol, the enormous fan, the reined-in horse and the matchlock resting on the shoulder of a courtier. Meanwhile, above it all, Jahāngīr sits facing the great Vedāntin saint Jadrūp in his cave-like hovel (**Fig. 3.14**). The diffusion of golden light that we see in the atmosphere of the painting is one of the signature elements of Govardhan's style. Above the dark green hedge that divides the two registers this ethereal light seems somehow distinct from the implied cacophony of the lower world. As is common in nearly all representations of saints in Indian painting, the two figures converse sitting on a raised platform near a tree. The distractions of urban life fade into the distance, as symbolized by the Renaissance-style town receding into the background.<sup>210</sup>

Just as late medieval sufi authors such as Mullā Dā'ūd and Qutban repurposed earlier Indic folk tales for a distinctly Islamic function, Emperor Jahāngīr—the princely patron of the *Mṛigāvatī* epic—situated his meeting with Jadrūp within an Islamic fold. In his memoirs he describes his first meeting with the Vedāntin saint thus (*italics are mine*):

The place he had chosen for his abode was a pit dug out in the middle of a hill. The entrance was *shaped like a mihrab* (the mosque prayer niche)... He had neither mat nor straw strewn underfoot as *other dervishes do*... although he is absolutely naked and has no clothing except a piece of rag with which he covers himself in front and behind, he never lights a fire. *As Mullā Rūmī says, speaking in the idiom of dervishes*: “Our clothing is the heat of the sun by day, and moonlight is our pillow and quilt by night”...

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210 Jahāngīr describes Jadrūp as a “Vedāntin,” from Ujjain. The contemporaneous *Dabistān-i-mazāhib* describes him as a follower of the great Advaita Vedāntin saint Shankarachāriyā. For more details see, Debra Diamond, Molly Emma Aitken, et al. *Yoga: the Art of Transformation*, 227, 313: f.n. 7. Vedāntins are yogis who strictly adhere to the Vedas, and believe in a non-formal absolute godhead *Brahma*. Once again, just like the sufis before him, owing to the similarities between a *nirguṇa* God and a *muṭlaq* God, Jahāngīr has no problems viewing the Vedāntin sadhu as a dervish. Jadrūp also features in a Victoria & Albert painting of Indic saints made for Dārā Shikōh in circa 1652.

He is not devoid of learning and has studied well the science of the Vedanta, *which is the science of Sufism*.<sup>211</sup>

It is crucial not to interpret these interactions as evidence of Hindu-Muslim syncretism, as many scholars have suggested. Imagining such interactions as “syncretic” fails to acknowledge the agency of a given patron, artist or culture. It tends to blur the lines between distinct belief systems, rather than recognizing the specific negotiations that take place during cultural engagements. We need to acknowledge that the Muslim patrons viewed and internalized such encounters through a clearly Islamic and *Islamizing* lens.<sup>212</sup> These are the very sentiments, deeply rooted in the larger Mughal elite culture, that were to influence Dārā Shikoh four decades later, propelling him into the serious intellectual endeavor of proving that the “science of the Vedanta” is none other than “the science of Sufism.”<sup>213</sup>

The practice of reconstituting the theme of the jōgī for a specifically Islamized devotional schema is most vividly on display in the now dispersed *Salīm Album* (assembled circa 1600-1605).<sup>214</sup> Apart from standing portraits of individuals from Akbar

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211 Jahāngīr, *The Jahangirnama: Memoirs of Jahangir, Emperor of India*, trans. by Wheeler Thackston (New York: Freer Gallery of Art, Arthur M. Sackler Gallery in association with Oxford University Press, 1999), 209.

212 When using the term “Islamic” I have followed Shahab Ahmad’s definition, in which Islam is viewed more holistically, not just as “religion” strictly speaking but as a lived culture. See my dissertation introduction for a detailed discussion.

213 See, Dārā Shikoh, *Majma’-ul-Bahrain or the Mingling of the Two Oceans*, translated by M. Mahfuz-ul-Ikhlaq (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1982). For a convincing discussion arguing that Jahāngīr and other Muslim ruler’s seemingly “syncretistic” actions were firmly rooted in Islamic culture see, Shahab Ahmad, *What is Islam?*, 439–452.

214 Dispersed in the early-twentieth century, the known folios of the album are all in European and American collection. The largest number of folios are in the Chester Beatty Album. There are around thirty-one pages that have been accounted for. For a detailed discussion on the Salim Album see, Elaine Wright, “The Salim Album, c. 1600-1605,” in *Muraqqa’: Imperial Mughal Albums from the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin*, ed. Elaine Wright (Alexandria, Va: Art Services International, 2008), 54-67. Also see, Leach, *Mughal and Other Indian Paintings*, vol. 1, 300–307.

and Salīm-period *darbārs*, the most prominent theme of the album is devotional, including representations of jōgīs and dervishes.<sup>215</sup> These devotional themes were imitated, in a remarkably similar compositional scheme, first by Prince Khurram—the future Emperor Shāh Jahān—in the first decade of the seventeenth-century, and three decades later by the teenage Dārā Shikoh in his famous British Library album.<sup>216</sup> Each image is accompanied by Persian verses written in horizontal bands framing the figures on the top, and occasionally below as well. Two striking representations of jōgīs in the *Salīm Album* and their accompanying texts reveal the sufic identification with Nāth spirituality (**Figs. 3.15** and **3.16**). It has been suggested that the two pages, one in the Harvard Museums and the other in the Chester Beatty Library, would have originally faced each other.<sup>217</sup> The album pages were made around the same time as the illustrated *Baḥr al-ḥayāt* (*The Ocean of Life*)—a Persian translation of the Sanskrit manual on *hātha yoga*—in which there are multiple representations of Śaiva jōgīs (**Fig. 3.17**).<sup>218</sup> Similar to the holy men in the *Baḥr al-ḥayāt*, the jōgīs in the *Salīm Album* are also shown with dogs.

In **Figure 3.15** from the Harvard Museums, the jōgī sitting on his haunches with his legs folded up—in a posture also assumed by Miyān Mīr and Mullā Shāh in Dārā Shikōh-period paintings—is wearing the familiar stitched orange robe of ṣaṇyāsīs and wandering dervishes. In an otherwise barren landscape the mendicant is surrounded by a

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215 Pages include Christian themes of Mary and Jesus, as well as one folio showing a Jesuit.

216 The album was tragically dispersed in a Sotheby's auction on June 15, 1959. For a note on the Khurram Album see, Wright and Stronge, *Muraqqa'*, Appendix 7, 473.

217 Sunil Sharma, "The Sati and the Yogi: Safavid and Mughal Imperial Self-Representation in Two Album Pages," in *In Harmony: The Norma Jean Calderwood Collection of Islamic Art*, ed. Mary McWilliams (Cambridge: Harvard Art Museums, 2013), 152. However, Elaine Wright has convincingly suggested that, although pages might have been viewed in a certain sequence, they were probably never bound into an album. See, Elaine Wright, "The Salim Album," 55.

218 Linda Leach, *Mughal and Other Indian Paintings from the Chester Beatty Library*, vol. 2, 556-564.

grassy halo, perhaps hinting at his evergreen inner state. In the further background a blue lake merges with the sky, which is lined with a miniscule flock of birds. His left hand, which holds a short, thin meditation crutch, is resting on his upturned black hat, while his other hand clasps his legs. The jōgī with his *sinḡī* necklace and large earrings looks with contentment at the two wild-eyed dogs playing around him. In **Figure 3.16** from the Chester Beatty Library, a more stern looking jōgī, in a black stitched robe similar to the one worn by Rājkuṇwar sits framed against the opening to his hovel in the wilderness, with his right hand assertively resting on the dog's head, perhaps even pressing its ear as an admonition.

It is clear from ample visual evidence that wandering jōgīs and dervishes alike kept companion animals. Contemporaneous literary references suggest that in addition to acting as loyal companions for mendicants journeying alone in the wilderness, dogs also carried an important symbolic function. The animal is a regularly occurring motif used by all of the great classical Persian poets from Rūmī to Amīr Khusro. In their poetry the dog reflects a dual nature that converges on the image of the dyadic human soul. It is both reviled and eulogized. In mainstream Muslim culture dogs are considered inherently impure, but in the Qur'ān they are awarded a higher status among animals by virtue of being included in the story of the sleepers (Qur'ān, 18:18). A cursory survey of Rūmī's *Mathnavī* reveals the figure of the dog as both loved and hated:

Thy friends are catching onagers in the desert; thou art catching a blind  
man in the street; this is bad.  
Thy friends seek onagers by hunting (them); thou in (mere) malice seekest  
a blind man in the street.  
The knowing dog has made the onager his prey, while this worthless dog  
has attacked a blind man.  
When the dog has learned the knowledge (imparted to him), he has

escaped from error: he hunts lawful prey in the jungles.  
 When the dog has become knowing (*‘ālim*), he marches briskly; when the  
 dog has become a knower of God (*‘arīf*), he becomes (as) the Men of the  
 Cave.<sup>219</sup>

As is evident from these lines the dog represents the volatile human soul, and just like the king’s attendants and the horse, needs to be kept in check. It must be tamed if the spiritual traveler is to succeed in attaining the ultimate goal: union with God. Over time the very word “dog” came to be associated with the “self,” so much so that poets would often refer to themselves, humbly, as “this dog.” This is wonderfully echoed in the four verses from **Figure 3.16**, in which the impassioned poet/lover calls out proclaiming:

I am the *jōgī* of love, and am passionate for you,  
 With every hair I desire you.  
 My shirt is made with the dust of his lane,  
 And that too has blood from (my) eyes and is ripped to its hem.

I am one with the seventy-two nations,  
 I should have a rosary and a (Christian’s) girdle.  
 Your dog is better than the entire world of fidelity,  
 If I am not your dog, the dog is better than me.<sup>220</sup>

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219 Reynolds Nicholson, Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, *The Mathnawī of Jalaluddin Rumi*, vol. I (London: Printed for the Trustees of the "E.J.W. Gibb Memorial", distr. by Luzac & Co, 1926), lines: 2630–2634. For more examples see:

“The Turcoman dogs fawn at the tent-door before the guest, But if any one having the face of a stranger pass by the tent, he will see the dogs rushing at him like lions. I am not less than a dog in devotion, nor is God less than a Turcoman in life (living power).” Lines: 831–834. And:

“When you have eaten your fill, you have become a carcass: you have become devoid of understanding and without feet (inert), like a wall. So at one time you are a carcass and at another time a dog: how will you run well in the road of the lions (follow the saints)?

Know that your only means of hunting is the dog (the animal soul): throw bones to the dog but seldom, Because when the dog has eaten its fill, it becomes rebellious: how should it run to the goodly chase and hunt?

Want of food was leading the Arab to that (exalted) court, and (there) he found his fortune.

We have related in the (foregoing) story the kindness shown by the King to that needy one who had no refuge.” Lines: 2874–2879.

220 I have slightly modified Sunil Sharma’s translation. See, Sunil Sharma, “The Sati and the Yogi,” 153. For an alternate translation by Wheeler Thackston see, Wright and Stronge, *Muraqqa’*, 270. Thackston has

In this composition the speaking protagonist of the verse identifies not with the jōgī but with the dog. The jōgī acts as the initiator and guide on the path to salvation. This sentiment is repeated in another folio from the *Salīm Album*, made by Basāwan (**Fig. 3.18**), in which we actually witness an aspirant kissing the feet of the guide, who in this case is a Muslim dervish.<sup>221</sup> The wispy, barefooted dervish stands beneath the tree of life with an open book, signifying guidance. On a branch directly above the guide sits a lightly sketched mischievous monkey mimicking the dervish's posture. The serene looking dog below has already come under the care of the guide and is shown as superior to the uninitiated devotee making his plea. As if to confirm the desperation of the seeker, the verse above the painting proclaims: "I have fallen at his feet from helplessness, would it be that he would take my hand?"

By the mid-seventeenth century the dog-as-self motif was embedded so deeply in the Indo-Muslim cultural consciousness that in a letter written to Shāh Dilrubā, Dārā Shikoh implores the saint by referring to himself as a lowly, wretched dog (**Fig. 3.19**):

I hope that they [Shāh Dilrubā] remember this lowest of dogs of their  
threshold [Dārā Shikoh],  
What worth do I have, since only a dog am I?  
All I desire is to accompany your dogs.

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preferred to read *chūkī* rather than the more obvious *jōgī*, in the first line of the first couplet. In the traditional *Nasta'liq* script it is common to drop the extra dots that would otherwise confirm the specific letter. In this case it could be "j" or "ch" depending on the context and meaning. Similarly it is common to drop the extra dash on top of the "k" stroke, which would otherwise confirm the letter "g". The word *chūkī* means "watchman," and in this context makes less sense than *jōgī*, which is the actual subject of the painting itself. However, we must assume that the calligrapher and the poet originally intended to instill this ambiguity, since double meaning (*ihām*) is a major convention in Persian and Urdu poetry.

221 See, Sonya Quintanilla, *Mughal Paintings: Art and Stories* (London: D. Giles, 2016), 196-197, fig. 4.57; and Howard Hodgkin and Terrence McInerney, *Indian Drawing: An Exhibition* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1983), fig. 52.



The painting from the Harvard Museums (**Fig. 3.15**) depicts the dog and jōgī theme in a slightly different way. The verses read:

Separated from my Beloved, I have become a jōgī,  
For that dear one I have become a jōgī

My Shāh is fond of the jōgīs,  
Thus, helpless, I have become a jōgī

These verses make it clear that the theme of the painting mirrors the exact theme of the *Rājkuṇṇwar Romance*, in which the hero must become a jōgī in order to find his beloved and achieve union with God. In this instance the beloved is referred to as the “Shāh,” which could simultaneously signify a worldly king or God. The happy, tame dogs would then reflect the jōgī hero’s submitted inner self.

For the medieval sufis and poets entering the Indian Subcontinent, it must have been a curious but common sight to see jōgīs wandering with their companion dogs. For the uniquely unruly sufis of the Qalandarī order, “whom we know as antinomian (*bī-sharʿ*) for their flagrant and deliberate transgression against legal norms,” keeping stray dogs would have been one of many typically subversive acts that they engaged in.<sup>222</sup>

Both visual and literary references confirm that wandering dervishes adopted the practice of the jōgīs and kept, not only pet dogs but in some cases rams, wild bears and even lions.<sup>223</sup>

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222 Scott Kugle, *Sufis and Saints' Bodies: Mysticism, Corporeality, and Sacred Power in Islam* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 182.

223 For an example of Qalandars with a dog see, Stuart Cary Welch, et al, *From Mind, Heart, and Hand: Persian, Turkish, and Indian Drawings From the Stuart Cary Welch Collection* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 208: fig. 75; and Andrew Topsfield, *In the Realm of Gods and Kings: Arts of India* (London: Philip Wilson, 2004), 198-199, fig. 81. One can’t help but think of the great Persian tragic hero Majnūn, who also roamed in the desert with wild animals, while yearning for his beloved.

By the time the *Salīm Album* was assembled in the early seventeenth century, the figures of the jōgī and the Qalandar had become more or less synonymous. Rizvi suggests that as early as the fourteenth century jōgīs and Qalandars wandered together, from *āshram* to *āshram* and *khānqāh* to *khānqāh*.<sup>224</sup> This mingling of two oceans of South Asian mysticism is on display in a painting from the *Rājkuṇwar Romance* (Fig. 3.20). It shows the prince with attendants distributing bread to mendicants in a courtyard.<sup>225</sup> At first glance all the ascetics appear to be jōgīs in their familiar attire. A more careful examination reveals that the figure in the lower left corner wearing a black, half-sleeved robe is in fact a Qalandarī sufi (Fig. 3.21).<sup>226</sup> The most immediate sign of his affiliation is his right arm marked by a row of self-inflicted burns, a form of ritualistic self-mortification most commonly associated with this particular community.<sup>227</sup> Additionally, a red leather pouch hanging from his girdle is another object regularly seen with wandering Qalandars. His black, floppy fur hat also sets him apart from the jōgīs in the painting. It is possible that the figure in front of him, in a grey skirt and a large white

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For a young Qalandar with a bear see, Stuart Cary Welch, Annemarie Schimmel, Marie Lukens Swietochowski, and Wheeler M. Thackston, *The Emperors' Album: Images of Mughal India* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1987), 234, 238, ill., verso pl. 75 (b/w); recto pl. 76 (color). For a Qalandar with a lion see, Navina Haidar, "Visual Splendour: Embellished Pages from the Metropolitan Museum's Collection of Islamic and Indian Manuscripts," *Arts of Asia* 42 (2012): 111–112, ill. fig. 8 (color). For an example of Indian ascetics with dogs from the *Gulshan Album* see, Debra Diamond, and Molly Emma Aitken, et al. *Yoga: the Art of Transformation*, 224–225, fig. 19a-b.

224 Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India, vol. I* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1978), 216.

225 See, Leach, *Mughal and Other Indian Paintings*, 205, 214, fig. 2.64 (b/w).

226 Debra Diamond has also identified the figure as a sufi. "Naths with straggly beards and black-garbed Sufi gather for a meal." See, Debra Diamond, and Molly Emma Aitken, et al. *Yoga: the Art of Transformation*, 209, 213: fig. 17h.

227 "...the three pearls of the bird Chamrosh symbolized the auspiciousness of the Iranian star-god Tishtriya, associated with the fixed star Sirius... It was thus a symbol of nighttime, light, and water, all at once... But as three dots, the same emblem survived in dervish orders of Iran." See, Abolala Soudavar, *Mithraic Societies: From Brotherhood to Religion's Adversary* (Houston: 2014), 21–22.

*chādar*, carrying a clay pot, is also a fellow dervish. He too has a leather pouch peeping out from under his *chādar*.

Another folio from the *Salīm Album* shows a Qalandar so similar to the jōgīs that he has been mistaken for a *kānphaṭā* (**Fig. 3.22**).<sup>228</sup> However, the couplet in the top band of the border clearly identifies him as a Qalandar. This is further affirmed by the fact that the Qalandars are known from various historical and biographical accounts to have shaved their heads as a rite of initiation. The couplet praises the Qalandar thus:

A thousand points finer than a strand of hair are here,  
Anyone who shaves his head does not get to know the Qalandar's way

The dervish, with his large earrings, beaded necklaces and iron bracelets, is blowing a large curved horn strikingly similar to those of the jōgīs from the Lahore-Chandigarh *Chandāyan* folio (**Fig. 3.3**). A red leather pouch, a gold-tipped conch, a wooden begging bowl and a slender knife hang from the belt that fastens his tunic. Another short blade is wedged into the belt. A pet ram with a collar of golden bells dutifully accompanies him.<sup>229</sup> A close counterpart to the present drawing, also from the late Akbar period, is a *nīm qalam* (half-tinted drawing) of a wandering ascetic from the collection of the Harvard Art Museums (**Fig. 3.23**). Attributed to Basāvan, this figure has also been

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228 This folio was formerly in the Sven Gahlin collection, but sold in a Sotheby's auction in London on October 6, 2015. For more details see, <http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2015/sven-gahlin-collection-115224/lot.8.html>

229 The appropriation of the jōgī into a sufi intentionality needs to be studied in further detail, particularly focusing on the intersection between medieval and early modern Indo-Muslim religious treatises and their visual parallels. Carl Ernst, who has already been cited, has made major discoveries regarding the sufi-jōgī dialogue in religious studies. It now needs to be linked with material and visual culture to arrive at a nuanced understanding of this interaction, and its impact on the larger Muslim culture in South Asia.

incorrectly identified as a *kānphaṭā* (Nāth) jōgī.<sup>230</sup> Bearing exactly the same accouterments as the dervish in the *Salīm Album* folio, this Qalandar is also accompanied by a dog.<sup>231</sup>

Just like the jōgīs, the Qalandars were ubiquitous in the South Asian religious landscape. From visual and hagiographical accounts it appears that they occupied the liminal space between urban, civilized society and the untamed wilderness. Ascetics such as Shāh Sharaf Bū ‘Alī Qalandar and Shāh Ḥusayn were extremely popular among the masses, transcending sectarian identifications. As wandering mendicants with little or no regard for rigid social hierarchies they were viewed with awe by the urban Muslim elite. As I will discuss in Chapter Four, the theme of the Qalandar was taken up far more programmatically by Jahāngīr’s grandson Dārā Shikoh, in the album that he compiled for his wife-to-be, Nādira Bānu Begum. His fascination with this unruly group in his formative years was to leave a deep mark on his later spiritual formation.

## II. Qalandars in Mughal Painting

*I am a Haydarī, a Qalandar, I am inebriated,  
I am the servant of ‘Alī Murtaẓā  
I have quaffed the wine of love of ‘Alī,  
And have now become drunk  
I have fastened the way of the Qalandar around my waist  
With a pure heart I have become a Ḥaydarī*

(Shāh Sharaf Bū ‘Alī Qalandar)<sup>232</sup>

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230 Welch, et al, *From Mind, Heart, and Hand: Persian, Turkish, and Indian Drawings From the Stuart Cary Welch Collection*, 88, fig. 21.

231 Another example of a Qalandar walking with his dog, also by Basawan, is in the Musée Guimet, Paris, No. 3619 Gb. See Okada, *Indian Miniatures of the Mughal Court*, 92.

232 For a popular rendition of the above cited poem see,  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RIAaHIAH98k>

Throughout the history of the organized mainstream sufi brotherhoods there have been groups of gnostics that frustrate snug historiographical classifications. Attached to the Malāmatī and Qalandarī lineages, these sufis consciously adopted diverse modes of heteropraxy to attain union with God.<sup>233</sup> The Qalandars in particular gained popularity in India during the fourteenth century. Starting in the tenth or eleventh century in Central Asia, small bands of wandering ascetics became known for ostentatiously rejecting formal rituals and prayers, considering them to be constraints on the inner journey of the soul. They usually had an unruly, subversive demeanor and regularly indulged in heavy drinking and opiates. Fifteenth and sixteenth-century Turkmen drawings in black ink (*siyāh qalam*) are some of the earliest representations of this group of wanderers, known in the Persian-speaking world as *bī-shar*, those who violate the *sharī'a* (**Fig. 3.24**).<sup>234</sup> In sufi hagiographies the Qalandars sometimes even show flagrant contempt for organized sufi brotherhoods.<sup>235</sup> The drawings mirror the literary records, indicating how the Qalandars were in turn received with awe, dread and repulsion. Perhaps owing to their early association with Central Asian shamanism, they were often characterized as occupying a liminal space between the earthly and the demonic. Acting at times as holy fools and at other times as powerful necromancers, they aimed to intentionally attract

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233 See Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India, vol. I* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1978), 303–307.

234 J.M. Rogers, *The Arts of Islam: Masterpieces from the Khalili Collection* (London 2010) catalogue number 209, 178–179. For an early example from Tabriz of a prince visiting a dervish see the ink drawing from the school of Muhammad Siyāh Qalam at the Topkapı Sarayı Museum, (ca. 1480), H. 2153, fol. 1v. The wonderfully stylized drawing shows two starved dogs in the lower-center wrestling each other.

235 They “seem to disregard or even fear the reputation of an upright Muslim, because of the dangerous sins of arrogance or ostentation that accompany public acknowledgements of probity.” See, Cyrus Ali Zargar, *Sufi Aesthetics* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2011), 85. For an example of the disdain with which Qalandars treated their more urbanized brethren, see Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India, vol. I*, 142.

blame as a way of extinguishing egoistical pride and desire. As an anti-exoteric gesture they would also appropriate customs from other religious traditions. As they entered India from Central Asia in the thirteenth century they brought with them various shamanistic rituals and characteristics from Iran and Afghanistan. In India they assumed the garb and practices of Hindu *saṃyāsīs*, often traveling with them in groups, as has already been shown.<sup>236</sup> Some of the aforementioned *siyāh qalam* drawings became models for later sixteenth-century representations of Qalandars in Persian painting. However, owing to the unique Indic flavor of South Asian Qalandars, the local visual record soon developed its own peculiarities. It appears that, starting with the late Akbar period, artists observed Qalandars that they saw in India, and from these observational drawings created distinctive types.

By the time of the Mughals, many wandering Qalandars had attached themselves to mainstream sufi *ṭuruq* such as the Qādirī, Suhwardī and Chishtī orders.<sup>237</sup> The Qalandarī brotherhood, always loosely defined, had also branched off into smaller groups. One of the most popular communities of Qalandars in India was the Ḥaydarī lineage, mentioned by the medieval saint Shāh Sharaf Bū ‘Alī Qalandar in the poem given at the beginning of the current section. In the poem Bū ‘Alī, who himself was a Qalandarī-Chishtī, calls himself a Ḥaydarī. He is referring both to the particular

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236 “Mongol domination of Central Asia and Iran facilitated the movement of the Qalandariyyas and the Jawaliqī groups from Turkey and Egypt into India... The contact of qalandars with Nath-yogis, also wandering throughout that part of the world, influenced them to wear earrings. Another custom they shared with the yogis was the consumption of a type of grass, probably Indian hemp”. Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, vol.I, 303.

237 The representation of Qalandars in Persian and Indian painting as a distinct theme deserves greater attention. In the future I intend to make a thorough examination of this sub-genre, linking it with larger Indo-Persianate literary conventions. However, for the current chapter I will only focus on a few examples that directly relate to Mughal patronage that eventually influenced Dārā Shikōh’s development as a young patron.

Qalandarī lineage established by Shaykh Abū Bakr Tūsi Ḥaydarī in Delhi in the mid-thirteenth century, and to Ḥaydar, one of the epithets of the Prophet’s nephew ‘Alī, after whom Bū ‘Alī himself is named (literally, “one who emanates the scent of ‘Alī”). The Ḥaydarīyya in particular adopted various jōgī customs including wearing iron bangles, piercing their ears and donning large earrings.<sup>238</sup> Other popular Qalandarī groups include the Jawālīqīs, the Jalālīs and the Khāksārīs.<sup>239</sup> Bū ‘Alī Qalandar is one of the most regularly featured saints in Indian painting across different regions and courts from the seventeenth century onward (**Fig. 3.25**).

Although painted depictions of Qalandars changed significantly from the Akbar era to the time of Dārā Shikoh, comparing them allows us to begin mapping the sub-genre as a whole. For example, the previously discussed *Salīm Album* folio (**Fig. 3.22**) with the inscription identifying the subject of the drawing as a Qalandar helps us recognize individuals who are depicted in other artworks. The mendicant in the already mentioned Akbar-period drawing by ‘Abd al-Ṣamad can also be identified as a Qalandar (**Fig. 3.10**). In addition to the familiar Qalandarī trappings—the large horn, bangles, earrings, animal skin, short tunic, begging bowl, leather pouch and small daggers—the ascetic also has a slash mark on his right arm, hinting at the common practice among Qalandars of inflicting burns and gashes on themselves as a ritual of self-control. The *nīm qalam* drawing uses familiar tropes associated with scenes of devotion. The encounter

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238 Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, vol. I, 307. Some of the earliest encounters with groups of Qalandars in India come from the writings of Ibn Baṭūṭa (d. 1377). “There came to me there (sic) a company of poor brethren who had iron rings on their necks and arms, and whose chief was a coal-black negro. They belonged to the corporation known as the Haidariya and they spent one night with us. Their chief asked me to supply him with fire wood | that they might light it for their dance”. See, H.A.R Gibb, *Travels of Ibn Battuta, A.D. 1325-1354*: Volume II (2010. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Ltd), 274.

239 Jürgen Wasim Frembgen, *The Friends of God: Sufi Saints in Islam: Popular Poster Art from Pakistan* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2006), Introduction.

between the emperor and the ascetic is staged in the wilderness, away from the distant city seen at the top right fading behind the rising hills. The fountain of life, coursing out of the recognizable plane tree, encircles the lower half of the drawing. The usual imperial retinue stands in check. The leashed dog held by the falconer at the lower right corner is possibly the dervish's companion animal, but is not considered pure enough to enter the emperor's presence. The paired animals in the background and the bird perched on the branch add to the tranquil natural setting. By contrast, the groom with his head cocked at an angle, the horse whinnying and stamping its feet, the large ram jutting into the scene to the right of the Qalandar, and the scurrying squirrel on the tree trunk add an undercurrent of frenetic energy to a composition that is typical of Akbar-period painting.

However, schematically speaking, there is one central feature of the composition that shatters the longstanding hierarchy found in representations of royalty visiting sages. Instead of the ascetic, who traditionally takes center stage, it is the young Akbar who is shown as the focal figure and the implied locus of God's immanence. Unlike the countless examples that serve to illustrate popular sufi stories in both Persian and Mughal manuscripts, such as the already discussed *Iskandar-nāma*, the sufi is actually shown standing below the prince, on a smaller platform. Even though the more established trope continued in illustrations, the later Akbar period (circa 1580–1605) was marked by a reversal of hierarchies. As will be discussed in the final section of this chapter, in the early Mughal polemic Akbar postulated himself as the locus of God's emanation, taking over the role customarily inhabited by the *valī*.

In an imperial framework in which the ruler fashioned himself as the spokesperson for the spiritual, there was little room for the development of devotional



portraiture dedicated to known saints. Representations of saintly “types” such as the wandering Qalandar continued to be an important theme nonetheless. In this way, Akbar’s atelier participated in a larger visual practice that unfolded across the Balkans-to-Bengal complex in the medieval and early modern periods, even though the signification of the imagery produced under his patronage went through changes. The *Salīm Album* Qalandar, for instance, can be dated to the late Akbar period.<sup>240</sup> Similarly, an isolated album folio from the British Museum also portrays a Qalandar from the 1590s (**Fig. 3.26**), shown with an animated, billowing red wrap, walking across the picture plane from right to left. He carries a golden staff that snakes into the head of a dragon. The staff, along with the circular, gold belt buckle fastening his tunic, suggests that he is a member of a particular Qalandarī lineage popular throughout Turkey and Central Asia called the Begtāshi dervishes. An ethnographic study of Muslim social groups from a British Museum album (**Fig. 3.27**) contains early seventeenth-century Turkish drawings of dervishes found in the larger Balkans-to-Bengal-complex. This collection has helped me identify various wandering ascetics, such as the one in **Figure 3.26**.

When the two dervishes from the Akbar period are compared to contemporaneous representations from the Ottoman Empire or Iran certain stylistic differences also become apparent. **Figure 3.28**, which is most likely a late sixteenth-century Persian painting, shows a Qalandar with common attributes and in a remarkably similar posture as the

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240 For more examples see, Roselyne Hurel, *Miniatures & peintures indiennes* (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale de France, 2010), 62, fig. 18; and, Milo Cleveland Beach, Stuart Cary Welch, and Glenn D. Lowry, *The Grand Mogul: Imperial Painting in India, 1600-1660* (Williamstown, Mass: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1978), 66-70. The Bibliothèque Nationale folio is from a late-Mughal album consisting of three disparate Mughal era devotional paintings collaged together. It includes a small Akbar period portrait of a Qalandar from circa 1595. For another example of a Qalandar from the Akbar period see, Cleveland Museum collection, Acc. no. 2013.302. Sonya Rhie Quintanilla, Dominique DeLuca, and Mohsen Ashtiany, *Mughal Paintings: Art and Stories: the Cleveland Museum of Art* (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 2016), 195, cat. 27.

*Salīm Album* dervish.<sup>241</sup> They are both walking, with one foot in front of the other, from the left to the right. They also share many of the familiar trappings of Qalandars, including the companion animal. However, the Safavid-period mendicant busy tying his turban around a tall conical hat is rendered in flat washes of color with hardly any attention to three-dimensional form or volume, other than in his face, which has a delicately shaded beard and mustache. The flattened and forward stooping figure—contained within a swooping black calligraphic outline—is an idealized rendition of the Qalandar compared to the Mughal example, which is more “naturalistically” modeled, incorporating a subtle awareness of three-dimensional perspective. The relative naturalism of the Akbar period is well known for blending illusionistic rendering techniques derived from European influence with the comparatively flat and calligraphic visual sensibility typical of Ottoman, Safavid and local South Asian schools of painting.

In Jahāngīr-period painting (1605–1628) figures became even more naturalistic, but continued to be juxtaposed with earlier conventions of multiple perspectives and flattened surfaces.<sup>242</sup> The selective naturalism witnessed in paintings from this period contributed to their allegorical function. Thematically, Qalandars persisted as symbols for otherworldly aspiration, even after Prince Salīm became Emperor Jahāngīr. One of the most admired paintings from this era, often titled “Squirrels in a Plane Tree” (circa 1608), is most likely an allegory of a Qalandar climbing the Tree of Life (**Fig. 3.29**). Widely thought to be the work of Jahāngīr’s favorite artist Abu’l Ḥasan—who was granted the

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241 The painting, formerly in the Louvre, is now probably in the Musée Guimet, Paris. Acc. No. MAO 1219. Image courtesy Catherine Benkheim.

242 Curiously, while Jahāngīr encouraged a more controlled naturalism, he was simultaneously extremely fond of the classical Safavid style of painting, quite unlike his father Akbar. Artists, such as Farrukh Beg were highly prized for their archaic Persian style. Perhaps that is a reason why distinctly Persian devotional themes were also encouraged under his patronage.

title *Nādir al-zamān* (peerless of the age)—the painting, now in the British Library collection, was probably once part of an early Jahāngīr-period album. Scholars have analyzed the work primarily in terms of its stylistic peculiarities and how they reveal the artistic evolution of one of the greatest Mughal painters. The enigmatic central theme of the painting has seldom been discussed beyond briefly mentioned speculations.<sup>243</sup>

J.P. Losty, who has written extensively about the artwork, has focused on Abu'l Ḥasan's earlier training in a Safavid idiom, examining how the artist fused the “archaic” style with European-inspired “mastery of volume and of movement,” which for him is a superior achievement.<sup>244</sup> I have already discussed Gregory Minissale's brilliant criticism of the prevailing art historical bias in which scholars such as Losty insist on privileging European canons of mimetic art making and judging Indian art according to those standards.<sup>245</sup> Mildred Archer and Toby Falk take this fixation on borrowing from European models—as if nothing original worth describing could ever be conceived of by the Indo-Persian framework—to the next level when they say:

The hunter himself is not an Indian figure, but would be quite at home in a sixteenth-century engraving by Peter Brueghel the Elder, or a hunting scene by Philipp Galle... The most probable explanation is that the picture was built up from European sources which have not yet been identified... The message of the picture must be of a more subtle and less explicit nature, and could itself have been borrowed from Europe.<sup>246</sup>

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243 For a typical example see Jeremiah Losty's entry in, Jeremiah P. Losty, and Linda York Leach, *Mughal Paintings from the British Library*, (London: Indar Pasricha Fine Arts, 1998), cat. 4. Also see, Jeremiah P. Losty, and Malini Roy, *Mughal India: Art, Culture and Empire: Manuscripts and Paintings in the British Library* (London: British Library, 2012), 97–99.

244 Losty and Roy, *Mughal India*, 99.

245 Minissale, *Images of Thought*, Chapter 1.

246 Toby Falk, and Mildred Archer, *Indian Miniatures in the India Office Library* (London: Sotheby Parke Bernet, 1981), 60.

What this deeply entrenched prejudice, in which the supposedly Renaissance-inspired “naturalistic” plane tree “breathes life into what would otherwise be an unexciting painting,”<sup>247</sup> overlooks is the greater Indo-Muslim cultural outlook. Such provincial conclusions speak volumes about the limitations of the scholarship itself, which is more at ease in the familiar surroundings of European art, and at sea when attempting to locate an artwork within the alien context of Islamic culture.

Having already examined examples from the Timurid, Safavid and Akbar periods earlier in this chapter, I contend that the symbols in the Abu’l Ḥasan painting are immediately recognizable and reveal their deep-rootedness within a Muslim context. They reflect the layered complexity of the Indo-Muslim visual imagination, in this instance localized within an evolving Mughal style in which newer techniques were becoming part of the pictorial lexicon. In fact, the Renaissance-inspired naturalistic figure and the masterfully animated squirrels heighten the aura of an otherworldly allegory, especially when these carefully selected elements are placed against the flattened gold sky, the Safavid-inspired rock formations with their bold outlines, and the curiously giant scale of the squirrels.

I offer the following interpretation of the painting. The plane tree is the oft-repeated Tree of Life regularly associated with sanctity. The stream that curls around the tree and winds up into the landscape acts as a divider between our world—which is literally outside the frame—and the archetypal realm, the *ālam-i-mithāl*, believed to exist above the terrestrial world. The cosmological symbolism of the Tree of Life in Islamic theology is most clearly explained in the well-circulated thirteenth-century treatise by Ibn

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<sup>247</sup> Losty and Roy, *Mughal India*, 99.

Ghanīm al-Maqdisī (d. 1280), titled *Shajarat al-kawn* (*The Cosmic Tree*). The treatise was so popular across the Islamic world that until recently scholars assumed it was authored by Ibn ‘Arabī.<sup>248</sup> It uses Qur’ānic descriptions of the Tree of Life as well as the *Akbarian* ontological division of creation, transposing it onto the tree that is symbolic of the Logos and associated with the Light of Muḥammad.<sup>249</sup> The tree acts as an *axis mundi*, piercing through the three main realms of existence: the underworld, the terrestrial realm and the heavens. The angelic beings who have been assigned specific duties for maintaining the balance in the cosmos are said to hover, similar to the numerous birds in the Abu’l Ḥasan painting, around the tree’s branches.<sup>250</sup>

Directly above the climbing dervish, at the top center of the composition, are two Indian silverbills vigilantly guarding their nest with two eggs (**Fig. 3.30**). The presence of paired birds in the Tree of Life, with one pair guarding its eggs, is another common motif repeated across Persian and Indian painting. Often, a snake hidden in the leaves of the branches is shown greedily slithering towards the eggs (**Fig. 3.31**).<sup>251</sup> In his *Mathnavī*, Rūmī explains how actions and their fruit are like the eggs and the bird. Their repeated presence in artworks could refer to the pregnant potential of human actions: good actions

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248 Younes Alaoui Mdaghri, “Critical Study of the Erroneous Attribution of the Book *Shajarat al-Kawn* to Ibn ‘Arabī Instead of to Ibn Ghānim al-Maqdisī,” *The Journal of Rotterdam Islamic and Social Sciences*, 1, No. 1 (2010): 1–16.

249 “God has set forth a parable: A good word is like a good tree whose roots are firmly fixed, and whose branches (reach up) into heaven” (Qur’ān, 14:24–29).

250 A. Jeffery, *Ibn al-‘Arabi’s Shajarat al-Kawn* (Lahore: Aziz Publishers, 1908), 33.

251 For another example see the Safavid period illustration of Jami’s *Ṣuḥbat-ul abrār*, Freer Gallery of Art, F1946.12.153v. [https://archive.asia.si.edu/collections/edan/object.php?q=fsg\\_F1946.12.153](https://archive.asia.si.edu/collections/edan/object.php?q=fsg_F1946.12.153)

hatch into birds that take angelic flight while bad actions, represented by the creeping serpent, swallow the potential good.<sup>252</sup>

As someone born in the Mughal court, Abu'l Ḥasan was trained under the greatest master artists of the age. His debt to Khwāja 'Abd al-Ṣamad, the head of the Akbar-period atelier, becomes evident when the already discussed *nīm qalam* showing a Qalandar paying homage to Akbar (**Fig. 3.10**) is compared to "Squirrels in a Plane Tree." The Safavid-inspired rock formations and carefully rendered tree are evocative of 'Abd al-Ṣamad's drawing, which depicts a similar spatial hierarchy. The winding stream divides the space into worldly and imaginal realms. In both artworks, the imaginal realm behind the tree lurches up, ending in dreamlike rock formations. The ram seen at an angle on the top right is also a feature shared by both artworks. Most peculiarly, the 'Abd al-Ṣamad drawing also features an animal resident in the tree trunk. In this case, however, it is the local Indian chipmunk and not the European squirrels preferred in the Jahāngīr-period example.

Abu'l Ḥasan's painting shows a climber, with both hands holding on to holes in the trunk, preparing for the seemingly impossible task of scaling the Tree of Life. Could this be an allegory for the spiritual path? One major element that favors this interpretation is the figure of the climber himself. He is wearing a coarse woolen tunic and a Central Asian fur hat. His rolled up right sleeve reveals a line of miniscule dots on his arm: burn marks from the Qalandarī practice of self-mortification (**Fig. 3.32**). He is also wearing a band made of several cords joined together that loops around his left shoulder.

Intriguingly, this is another piece of gear shared with members of the larger Indic

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<sup>252</sup> Nicholson, *The Mathnawi of Jalaluddin Rumi*, Book II, line 982. Michael Barry suggests that it was the great late-Timurid era master Behzād who created these visual conceits that later spread into India as well. Michael Barry, *Figurative Art in Medieval Islam*, 15, 372-373.

community of monist mystics. Followers of Kabīr and Gurū Nānak, for instance, are regularly shown wearing a black band of threads in a similar fashion (**Fig. 3.33**). Many other paintings of Qalandars show their subjects wearing the same type of threads (**Fig. 3.34**). Since Qalandars, Kabīr Panthīs, Gorakhnāthīs and other antinomian groups in South Asia consciously distanced themselves from mainstream Hinduism and Islam, they scoffed at caste distinctions, false piety and the rigidity of social hierarchies. Is it possible then that the black thread worn on top of their garments is a symbolic inversion of the sacred thread (*janeu*) worn by upper-caste Hindus? By this logic, the black cord could be a wry sign of the Qalandar's rejection of conventional hierarchical religious identity.

Although there is no textual evidence on the folio that could confirm the theme of Abu'l Ḥasan's painting, its Qalandar protagonist and the devotional markers in the artwork—references found across the Muslim world but localized here in a Mughal context—strongly suggest that the painting is, among other things, an allegory for the spiritual path of Sufism. I therefore offer that this masterwork of Jahāngīr-period painting should be renamed as “A Dervish Climbing the Tree of Life.”

It is important to note that depictions of Qalandars were not exclusively allegorical. Beginning with the late Akbar period, master artists such as Govardhan and Basāwan captured the daily practices and rituals of dervishes and jōgīs. Some outstanding early examples are found collated together in the famous *Gulshan Album* made for the Emperor Jahāngīr in 1610/11, toward the beginning of his reign.<sup>253</sup> In folios 6b and 13a

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253 Most of the album folios are in Tehran. The entire album has never been published in its entirety. Milo Beach has done the most extensive study of the folios. See, for example:

<https://www.metmuseum.org/metmedia/video/lectures/gulshan-album>. Once the folios are made available for scholarly research, the album would provide crucial insight into Jahangir's burgeoning patronage of devotional painting. The first known grand album, *Gulshan Album* serves as a prototype for later deluxe albums, such as the *Shāh Jahān Album* and the *Dārā Shikoh Album*.

from the collection of the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin (**Figs. 3.35 and 3.36**) different types of wandering Indian ascetics collected from various albums and manuscripts have been juxtaposed with illustrations of nurturing mother animals. In these and other “generic” looking scenes, ascetics are shown in their everyday surroundings, either walking in the wilderness singing devotional songs—as the Rāmānand jōgī with fluttering orange scarf is shown at the top left in folio 6b—gathered in groups under the shade of *pīpal* trees, or sitting outside their humble dwelling being visited by devotees—as shown in folio 13a.<sup>254</sup>

“Genre” scenes of dervishes and jōgīs continued into the Shāh Jahān period.

**Figure 3.37** is a typical example of a group of ascetics in a landscape and includes a Qalandar.<sup>255</sup> This particular composition seems to be a popular one, since variations on this theme are known, including one in the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin.<sup>256</sup> Three sufi ascetics are gathered at dusk under the shade of a tamarind tree, absorbed in music. The trio represents three distinct possibilities within the Islamic spiritual canopy: a warrior ascetic seated on his haunches, supported by a scarf wrapped around his legs and holding an arrow with a notched head; a more conventional, aged sufi with a long-armed yellow cloak, his head tilted and eyes lost in meditation; and a white-bearded Qalandar, immediately recognizable by his foreign-looking cap, iron bangles and a belt from which hangs a leather pouch as well as two short daggers and a wooden begging bowl. Behind a pond in the background we can see a glimpse of a village and a woman spinning cotton. Given the popularity of showing distinct devotional types assembled in one gathering, it

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254 The figure in folio 13a is often identified as a Nāth yogi, probably owing to his ash-smeared body shown in the lower register. See, Debra Diamond, and Molly Emma Aitken, et al. *Yoga: the Art of Transformation*, 227.

255 Roselyne Hurel, *Miniatures & Peintures Indiennes*, 86, fig. 71.

256 Berlin, ISL, I.4594.



is possible that this motif initially supported a poetic trope, but then became detached from its original context to be repeated independently. It is also possible that such paintings are accurate ethnographic portrayals of scenes common across the South Asian rural landscape, where individuals from different orders, even different religious affiliations, congregated to listen to music, hold discussions and meditate.

Just as Qalandars featured regularly in royal albums under early Mughal patronage, they continued to be depicted by the greatest artists in the imperial atelier during the reign of Shāh Jahān (1628-1658). Two carefully observed examples come from the *Shāh Jahān Album* (compiled ca. 1630-1640), which also includes paintings from earlier reigns. The folios, which would have been bound facing each other, both show a Qalandar in the wilderness leading an animal. **Figure 3.38** is a painting ascribed to the artist Govardhan by a caption written in Shāh Jahān's own hand. Made sometime in the mid-1630s, it shows a youthful dervish wearing a maroon Turkish cap and adorned with iron bracelets, leading a tame bear. The meticulously rendered burn marks branded all over his body are a sign of self-mortification, a practice that signifies a turning away from desires of the flesh toward a self-negating love for God. In the facing album folio (**Fig. 3.39**) ascribed to the artist Padārath, another young ascetic is shown leading a chained lion. He too has marks in the form of two thin gashes on his biceps. In both folios the surrounding cartouches in the margins have *ghazals* from the medieval poet Qāsimī. The couplet directly above the dervish with the lion reads:

Pious Qāsimī, within us two sins have befallen  
 You did not drink the wine, and you taunted the intoxicated *rend* (inspired  
 libertine)

The two young dervishes can in fact be identified as Madārīs, a lineage of Qalandars found only in South Asia. Madārī Qalandars are followers of the popular medieval Muslim saint Shāh Madār (d. 1434) who is buried in Kanpur. He is the patron saint of Hindu and Muslim acrobats and animal trainers. These wandering mendicants continue to be visible in the social landscape of contemporary South Asia. To this day, those who travel from village to village with trained bear, monkeys, goats and dogs performing tricks are called Madārīs, even when no one is aware of their historical link to the sufi saint from Uttar Pradesh.<sup>257</sup>

Stuart Cary Welch has suggested that since Dārā Shikoh was attracted to these dervishes from an early age, the paintings were made under his patronage.<sup>258</sup> However, given that both artworks were made in the 1630s, at a time when Dārā Shikoh was in his early teens, it is highly unlikely that two of the greatest artists of the imperial court would have been loaned to him from the emperor's atelier. None of the elite artists from Shāh Jahān's court contributed artworks to the *Dārā Shikoh Album*, made around the same time as the *Shāh Jahān Album* paintings of the two dervishes. Furthermore, historian Munis Faruqui has shown that Dārā Shikoh's prominence and influence came into flower during the 1640s.<sup>259</sup> It is only in this period that the prince had free access to the best court artists. Additionally, as I will suggest in Chapter Four, artworks made under the prince's patronage continued to maintain certain conceptual links to prior models but

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257 There are countless representations of Shāh Madār in Indian painting. He particularly seems to have been a favorite subject for painting in eighteenth century Avadh and its related courts. One enigmatic Deccani painting from the seventeenth century shows Shāh Madār in a ruined graveyard surrounded by his Qalandarī disciples. See, Navina Haidar and Marika Sardar, *Sultans of Deccan India, 1500-1700: Opulence and Fantasy*, cat. 38.

258 Stuart Cary Welch, et al, *The Emperors' Album: Images of Mughal India* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1987), 236-240, fig. 76, 77.

259 Munis Faruqui, *The Princes of the Mughal Empire, 1504-1719* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), Chapter 3.

differed in their meaning and functionality when compared with those commissioned by earlier royal patrons. Given Dārā's frequent contact with living mystics and personal attachment to Sufism, paintings made under his patronage directly link him to the subjects represented, even as early as his teen years. Unlike the dervishes from the *Shāh Jahān Album*, the ascetics in these works are not observed from a cool distance, but instead mingle freely in the same pictorial and narrative space as the young prince. In Chapter Four I will discuss the influence of the Qalandarī way on the formation of Dārā Shikoh's spiritual persona by focusing on representations of Qalandars in the famous *Dārā Shikoh Album*.

### **III. The Representation of Popular Saints During the Reigns of Akbar, Jahāngīr and Shāh Jahān**

Under the patronage of Akbar, Jahāngīr and Shāh Jahān historical and legendary popular saints played an important iconographic role as bestowers of divine authority. Artworks commissioned by the three emperors demonstrate conceptual continuities in the representation of saints as well as subtle differences. Broadly speaking, during Akbar's reign the emperor gradually replaced the saint as the nexus between earthly power and the divine. In his visual program and in state rhetoric Akbar performed two functions: emperor of the world and the spokesperson of God. After assuming kingship Jahāngīr continued this state policy but reintroduced the saint as a figure who legitimized the two roles of the Mughal emperor. Under Shāh Jahān saints played a far more central role in fashioning court ideology. It is during his reign that we witness well-known living saints being given the same elevated status as nobility and high-ranking court officials depicted

in the great imperial albums. Along with the royals themselves, it was these very court officials and other visiting dignitaries who were the primary audience for the albums. Various themes from these collections, such as saints' portraits, were copied and circulated for lesser nobility and subjugated regional rulers.

The current discussion looks at saints and the patronage of the three great Mughal rulers through a very broad lens, citing key artworks that reflect the larger tendencies peculiar to each ruler. By establishing a preliminary map of these general trends we can better understand the innovations that occurred through the patronage of Dārā Shikoh and Jahānārā Begum. As we shall see in Chapter Four, it was under the royal siblings' guidance that saints' portraits became detached from their political context and found a new function as objects of devotion.

I have chosen to begin this survey with the patronage of Akbar, rather than his early Mughal predecessors, because he was the first great consolidator of Mughal power and patronage in India. As Heike Franke and other scholars have extensively discussed Akbar viewed himself as “Emperor of the Two Worlds.”<sup>260</sup> This philosophy of kingship came into greater focus over the course of his reign, as he evolved from a precarious adolescent monarch into a major imperial force. His mature visual program includes devotional themes and motifs inherited from Persianate and Indic sources. These continuities are more apparent in the earlier period of Akbar's reign, or in illustrations of historical episodes narrating events from his childhood. In the late 1570s a clear shift occurred when the Emperor began to be portrayed as the nexus of spiritual and temporal

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260 For a detailed discussion on this theme and its connection to the emperors' political personae see, Franke Heike, “Emperors of Surat and Ma'ni: Jahangir and Shah Jahan as Temporal and Spiritual Rulers,” *Muqarnas. An Annual on the Visual Cultures of the Islamic World* Volume 31 (2014): 123-149.

power, demoting the traditionally accepted “bridge” between earthly and heavenly authority: the Muslim saint.

An example of Akbar inheriting the Persianate theme of a prince visiting a sage is wonderfully depicted in an *Akbar-nāma* folio (circa 1586-87) in the Chester Beatty Library collection (**Fig. 3.40**).<sup>261</sup> Early Mughal royalty, including the adolescent Akbar, regularly visited the sage Bābā Bilās who lived on the outskirts of Ghazni. In the *Akbar-nāma* (completed in 1594) Abu’l Faḥl describes how on one of these visits the ascetic predicted Akbar’s future greatness. Perhaps for this reason, the anecdote and its corresponding painting were included in the official chronicle of the emperor’s life. The representation of this historical meeting clearly contributed to the creation of a kingly persona that embodied both heavenly and worldly prestige.

According to Peter Hardy, “In order...to praise God, Abul Faḥl [Akbar’s court historian and mouthpiece] necessarily has had recourse to describing and recording the deeds of a God-worshipping *pādshāh*, the *insan-i kamil* or Perfect Man. This figure is none other than Akbar.”<sup>262</sup> In fact, Abul Faḥl goes so far as to say that, given Akbar’s status as a reflection of God’s divine light (*farr-i izzadī*), he has no need for intermediaries.<sup>263</sup> In the first half of his reign Akbar appears to have upheld the usual customs of visiting saints to ask for their intercession. In one famous meeting he visited the Chishtī saint Salīm in Fatehpur Sikri, asking him to pray for a male heir. Soon, in 1569, a boy was born and given the name Salīm. Akbar also walked on foot to Ajmer to

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261 Leach, *Mughal and Other Indian Paintings*, vol. I, 131-133, color plate 14.

262 Peter Hardy, “Abul Faḥl’s Portrait of the Perfect Padshah: A Political Philosophy for Mughal India – or a Personal Puff for a Pal?” in *Islam in India: Studies and Commentaries*, vol. 2, *Religion and Religious Education*, ed. Christian W. Troll (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1985), 116.

263 Abul Faḥl, *The History of Akbar*, vol. 1, ed. and translated by Wheeler Thackston (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press: 2015), 20-21.

give thanks at the shrine of the founding saint of the Chishtī order, Mu'īn al-Dīn (d. 1236). However, Akbar's interest in seeking saintly intercession gradually dwindled.

In the introduction to the *Akbar-nāma* Abu'l Faḥl brilliantly uses analogical reasoning (*qiyās*) coupled with a flowery rhetoric to construct Akbar's persona as the *insān-al-kāmil*: "To him is entrusted sway over (outward) form (*ṣūrat*) and (inner) meaning (*ma'nī*), the exoteric (*ẓāhir*) and the esoteric (*bāṭin*)."<sup>264</sup> In Islamic intellectual history, and particularly within the philosophical school of Ibn al-'Arabī, every created thing has two essential aspects that comprise its *raison d'être*. The term *ma'nī* corresponds to its inner meaning and *ṣūrat* its outward form. The world of *ma'nī* refers to the realm of God, that which is beyond creation; it is also simultaneously the inner, unbounded reality that animates all creation. The world of *ṣūrat* signifies the earthly realm of created forms, the sphere in which God's boundless potentiality is manifested in an illusory manner. Abul Faḥl's repeated use of these terms in relation to the emperor as ruler over the two worlds—inner meaning and outward form—elevates the king to the status of the model human being, thus bypassing the need for saintly intercession.

In another famous episode Abu'l Faḥl describes an occasion in 1578 when the emperor, separated from his hunting party, was overcome with heat and exhaustion and entered into a *hāl*, or a trance-like state, in which he felt God communicating with him directly.<sup>265</sup> The *hāl* is typically associated with practitioners of Sufism and is thought of as a temporary state in which the mystic loses himself in the presence of the divine. The Victoria and Albert Museum's *Akbar-nāma* (1586–87) page illustrating Abu'l Faḥl's

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264 Abul Faḥl, *Akbarnama*, pp. 4-5. Cited in, Peter Hardy, "Abul Faḥl's Portrait of the Perfect Padshah, 116.

265 Abul Faḥl, *Akbarnama*, vol. II, translated by H. Beveridge (Calcutta Baptist Mission Press, 1897-1939), 520–524.

passage situates Akbar in a setting that was usually the haunt of wandering dervishes (Fig. 3.41).<sup>266</sup> The emperor, sitting cross-legged under the shade of a tree, is shown at a fair distance from the city, isolated from the chaos of the hunting party. The strong diagonals and swirling compositional format of the painting converge upon the swooning Akbar. By transposing the emperor into a landscape and *hāl* typically associated with images of holy men the painting once again affirms the king's identity as the *insān al-kāmil*.

Another painting from the same period, made by 'Abd al-Ṣamad, shows a prince visiting a hermit in his cave (Fig. 3.42). Just like the previously discussed drawing by the same artist (Fig. 3.10), all the visual markers would seem to place the painting within the long-established Persianate convention of a prince or king visiting a gnostic. And yet, in this artwork—which Sheila Canby suggests represents a young Emperor Akbar—the roles are once again reversed.<sup>267</sup> It is Akbar who is depicted seated under the cosmic tree, elevated slightly higher than the hermit in the cave. The fountain of immortality, replete with swimming fish, also flows from under *his* seat. The fact that Akbar commissioned none other than the master of the imperial workshop to reconfigure this theme strongly suggests that he was deeply invested in forging a new imperial identity that consciously set him apart from his predecessors. According to Carl Ernst, “(T)he symbolism of world-domination inherent in the Mongol political tradition was given an ingenious philosophical and mystical twist in the writings of Akbar's minister Abū L-Faḍl, who

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266 Gian Carlo Calza, *Akbar: the great emperor of India* (Rome : Fondazione, Roma Museo, 2012), 266 , cat. no.V.1. For a discussion on the re-dating of the *Akbarnama* see, John Seyller, "Codicological Aspects of the Victoria and Albert Museum Akbarnāma and Their Historical Implications," *Art Journal*. 49, no. 4 (1990): 379–387.

267 Sheila Canby, "Mughal Painting: Princes and Potentates," *Arts of Asia*. 28, no. 2 (1998): 111.

interpreted Akbar's role in terms of the Neoplatonic metaphysics of Ishrāqī Illuminationism and the Sufī doctrine of the Perfect Human.”<sup>268</sup>

The subsequent reign of Jahāngīr saw a shift in the emperor's approach to pictorial self-fashioning. Under Jahāngīr, saints were cast as symbolic endorsers of imperial power and were framed within an “allegorical” visual language that was almost completely unprecedented. Performing their allegorical role in some of the most famous paintings of the period, saints affirm the emperor's divine right to rule. This view of sovereignty was visualized through a new set of pictorial conventions that expanded the landscape of devotional representation and persisted into the reigns of the later Mughal kings of the eighteenth century.

Whereas the Akbar period is best remembered for its illustrated manuscripts, the Jahāngīr and Shāh Jahān periods are known for the production of *muraqqa*'s, albums containing disparate folios of calligraphy and paintings. One exquisite page from the *Minto Album* (circa 1610-18) depicts a sage who is believed to be the twelfth-century saint Mu'īn al-Dīn Chishtī, painted by the artist Bichitr (**Fig. 3.43**). This is the same saint whose mausoleum Akbar walked to barefoot as a pilgrim.<sup>269</sup> In the *Minto Album* page, the figure is painted in profile wearing a white robe and turban and standing against a dark green background punctuated by a striking green halo illuminated with gold. Though imaginary, the representational language of the portrait stands in stark contrast to the more generalized depictions that characterize the Akbar-period representations of saints. The striking naturalism of the figure, with its slightly stooped stance, meticulously

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268 Carl W. Ernst, “The Limits of Universalism in Islamic Thought: the Case of Indian Religions,” *The Muslim World*, vol.101, issue 1 (Jan 2011): 1–19.

269 Wright and Stronge, *Muraqqa'*, 288. Although the identity of the saint has been the subject of debate, Stronge and Okada are convinced that this is an imaginary portrait of Mu'īn Chishtī.



rendered beard, and wrinkled yet keenly alert face, evokes a living individual standing before the viewer. With a staff resting against his arm, Mu'īn al-Dīn is shown presenting a globe mounted with a crown. At the top of the globe, just below the crown, is a golden key—the symbolic “key to both worlds” that the saints are said to possess. According to Susan Stronge and Amina Okada the page with the figure of the great Chishtī saint would have been bound opposite a folio showing the figure of Jahāngīr also holding a globe (Fig. 3.44). In Jahāngīr's hand the key is firmly fastened into the globe, as if unlocking the world. If we imagine the two figures facing each other as originally intended, spiritual authority appears to be crossing space and time to invest the emperor with dominion over both the temporal and spiritual worlds: the worlds of *śūrat* and *ma'ni*.<sup>270</sup> The minute gold inscription on the globe in the saint's hands affirms: “The key to the conquest of the two worlds is entrusted to your hands.”<sup>271</sup> According to Amina Okada, “the presence of a holy man, or mullā, beside the emperor conveyed the ruler's uncontested spiritual authority.”<sup>272</sup> Could it be conversely argued that illustrations such as this existed precisely because Jahāngīr's authority was in doubt, and the emperor felt the need for a convincing validation?

Mu'īn al-Dīn's portrait also bears a striking iconographic resemblance to several later Mughal and Pahari depictions of the Qur'ānic prophet-saint, Khizr, whose name

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270 “The subject of the painting is obviously the presentation of temporal and spiritual sovereignty by the saint Mu'īn al-Dīn Chishtī to Jahangir, as Robert Skelton, Linda Leach, and others have already observed. However, the painter seems to have also made recourse to a metaphorical expression used by Abu'l-Fazl, who wrote, ‘the shahanshah is the key to all temporal and spiritual locks.’ Hence, the ‘two worlds’ mentioned on the double page are again the spheres of *śurat* and *ma'ni*.” See, Franke, “Emperors of Surat and Ma'ni,” 133.

271 Wright and Stronge, *Muraqqa'*, 88-92.

272 Amina Okada, *Indian Miniatures of the Mughal Court*, 36. In the case of Jahāngīr and Shāh Jahan period paintings that stage such an intersection between spiritual and imperial power, the symbolic elements are mostly borrowed from Renaissance iconography.

literally means “the Green One.” Regarded as the hidden guide of all sufi masters, Khizr is pre-eminent as a spiritual initiator. It is conceivable that the portrait in question is a simultaneous embodiment of both Khizr and Chishtī, adding another layer to the initiatic subtext of Jahāngīr’s acceptance of the crowned globe. The painting’s dark green background and halo attest to the figure’s multi-valence, as do the distinctive bright red shoes, which are frequently seen in representations of Khizr. As will be discussed later, in Shāh Jahān-period paintings the iconography associated here with Mu’īn al-Dīn was used expressly to depict Khizr.

Jahāngīr as king of the two worlds, but with an eye toward the saintly intercessor, is best represented in one of the most famous allegorical paintings commissioned for the king. Commonly titled “Jahāngīr Preferring a Sufi Shaykh to Kings” (circa 1615-1618) and part of the *St. Petersburg Muraqqa’*, this painting from the Freer-Sackler collection is also ascribed to Bichitr (**Fig. 3.45**). It shows Jahāngīr seated on an hourglass and haloed by a large sun and a new moon, presenting a book to Shaykh Ḥusayn Chishtī, who had been reinstated as the caretaker of the shrine of Mu’īn al-Dīn Chishtī in Ajmer late in Akbar’s reign (1601). The quatrain in the cartouches framing the painting points out, not only Jahāngīr’s rule over the worlds of form and meaning, but also his preference for spiritual leaders over worldly ones:

The emperor of *ṣūrat* (form) and *ma’ nī* (meaning) is, by the grace of God  
Shāh Nūr al-Dīn Jahāngīr son of Emperor Akbar

Even though in [the world of] *ṣūrat* kings stand before him,  
In [the world of] *ma’ nī* he always turns his gaze towards the dervishes<sup>273</sup>

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273 For a slightly different translation as well as a lengthy discussion see, Richard Ettinghausen, “The Emperor’s Choice,” *De Artibus Opuscula XL: Essays in Honor of Erwin Panofsky*, ed. Millard Meiss (New York, 1961). The painting is one of the most regularly discussed paintings in all of Mughal India and a list of all the citations would be far too lengthy. For a succinct analysis see, Milo Beach, *The Imperial Image*:

And yet, the Akbar-era theme of placing the emperor above the sufi is taken one step further in this painting; the emperor is actually shown bestowing the sage with a book, which according to Heike Franke signifies sovereignty.<sup>274</sup> Shaykh Ḥusayn benignly spreads out his *chādar* to accept the gift (**Fig. 3.46**). Given that the *putto* on the top left of the composition carries a broken arrow suggesting a reign of peace, the gift could also symbolize the emperor's bestowal of protection upon the sage. This reading hints at a subtly reciprocal relationship between the emperor and the sage, whose presence legitimizes imperial claims to divinely ordained kingship.

In the last decade of his reign, with his health rapidly deteriorating, Jahāngīr regularly sought guidance from both Hindu and Muslim saints, eagerly setting out on long journeys to converse with them. According to Jahāngīr, "Although we have the business of kingship before us, every moment we think more and more on the dervishes. If the heart of our Dervish be gladdened by us we count that to be the profit of our kingship."<sup>275</sup> Whether we take this passage from Jahāngīr's own memoirs as staged rhetoric or sincere devotion, there is a clear correlation between the presence of popular saints in albums during the second part of his reign and his increasing preoccupation with spiritual matters. The already discussed painting of Jahāngīr's visit to the sage Jadrūp is one such example from the second half of his rule.

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*Paintings for the Mughal Court* (Washington, D.C.: Freer Gallery of Art, 1981), 168-169. For religious studies perspective see, Azfar Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 206-209.

274 "We may rather suppose that just as in the presentation of the globe the gift is not the ball itself but temporal power, here the book is not meant to be merely a special edition...but a symbol of spiritual authority complementing Jahangir's secular might," Franke, "Emperors of Surat and Ma'ni," 137.

275 Okada, *Indian Miniatures of the Mughal Court*, 42.

The elaborate allegorical paintings of the Jahāngīr period beg the question, why did the long-established tradition of viewing saints as intercessors need a new pictorial language? One possible explanation could be connected to the new personae that the Mughal emperors had constructed for themselves as global and millennial sovereigns. Their interaction with Iranians, Ottomans and Europeans placed them squarely within a globalizing world of mega-monarchies. Apart from economic and military might, another way to establish political and spiritual domination was to fashion themselves as rightfully ordained rulers emanating God's own majesty and light. In the context of painting, the carefully deployed use of European-inspired naturalism became a novel visual device that illusionistically localized God's majesty in the visage of a particular emperor.<sup>276</sup> These images went hand-in-hand with court histories, biographies and memoirs written by the kings themselves. In these texts, as Azfar Moin has so clearly pointed out, the Mughal emperors portrayed themselves as millennial sovereigns: the stewards of the second Islamic millennium which began during Akbar's reign in 1591. Because they perceived themselves as being poised at the epicenter of a majestic historical moment they required a grand, allegorical visual program.

During Shāh Jahān's reign (1628-1658) Muslim sages—and Sufism in general—played a heightened role in court life, Indo-Muslim art and architecture, and devotional culture. Even more so than his predecessors, the emperor surrounded himself with sufis and paid regular visits to renowned saints. A well-known sufi, Shaykh Naẓīr, who was also frequently armed, belonged to Shāh Jahān's immediate retinue and stood watch outside the emperor's bedchamber, guarding it with both the armor of prayer and armor

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<sup>276</sup> Kavita Singh importantly shows how European stylistic and iconographic choices were localized for a specifically Indo-Persianate use. Kavita Singh, *Real Birds in Imagined Gardens: Mughal Painting Between Persia and Europe* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2017), 35-37.

of steel.<sup>277</sup> There are many court portraits that show sufi *shaykhs* blessing important events, such as a folio from the *Late Shāh Jahān Album* (**Fig. 3.47**). Made by the court artist ‘Ābid in the late 1620s, early in Shāh Jahān’s reign, the painting depicts a ceremony in which the king is appointing the noble Maḥābat Khan to the position of commander-in-chief. An unknown *shaykh* positioned directly under the king and standing on a draped step can be seen making a *du’ā* (prayer or blessing). Visual inclusions such as this one sanctify scenes that would otherwise be understood as exclusively political. They draw worldly commemorations into a sacred sphere.

Although Shāh Jahān continued Akbar’s tradition of visiting Mu’īn al-Din Chishtī’s shrine at Ajmer, he appears to have favored the Qādirī sufis to whom he went for advice. These included Shaykh Bilāwal Qādirī, Khwāja Bihārī and Miyān Mīr—the living head of the order in Lahore and Mullā Shāh’s guide—whom he visited at least three times.<sup>278</sup> After Miyān Mīr’s death in 1635 he maintained a correspondence with Mullā Shāh and met with him in Kashmir.<sup>279</sup>

In terms of cultural expression, Ibn al-‘Arabī’s *Akbarian* metaphysics is most clearly and famously embodied in Shāh Jahān’s greatest monument, the Taj Mahal. Wayne Begley has convincingly demonstrated how sufi scholars close to the court actively influenced the underlying symbolic program of the Taj, which functioned—in addition to being the queen’s tomb—as a stage for the reenactment of the Day of Judgment.<sup>280</sup>

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277 ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Lāhawī, *Lahori’s Padshahnamah*, translated by H. A. Qureshi (Delhi: Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Delli, 2010), 294.

278 Lāhawī, *Lahori’s Padshahnamah*, 186, 203.

279 Muḥammad Ṣaleḥ Kambo, *‘Amal-i-Ṣaleḥ: Shah Jahan Nāma*, vol. III (Lahore: Majlis-i-taraqi-e-adab, 1972), 96.

280 Wayne Begley, “The Myth of the Taj Mahal and a New Theory of its Symbolic Meaning,” *The Art Bulletin*. 61, no. 1 (1979): 26.

In Shāh Jahānī painting, just as in court life, prominent sufis began to feature more regularly in the imperial milieu. For the first time, individual portraits of renowned living sufis were curated into elite albums, spaces where portraits of royalty and nobility comingled with the finest examples of calligraphy, European prints and idyllic genre scenes, to generate a particular aura of imperial luster. This development could also have been the result of a shift in focus among patrons. During this period royal albums were commissioned from the imperial atelier more frequently than illustrated manuscripts. Attention thus shifted from engaging with larger themes and narratives to focusing on important individuals and their circles of influence.

During Akbar's time single portraits of dervishes and jōgīs tended to represent generic types rather than known individuals. In the Jahāngīr period historical and mythic sages began to be included in albums, but they were generally valued as allegorical figures and were shown interacting either with royalty or with each other. In Shāh Jahānī albums, however, we see isolated, single portraits of known saints, many of which resemble portraits of nobility.

One of the most lavishly rendered paintings of a saint from this later period is the British Library portrait of Miyān Mīr, from the Johnson collection (**Fig. 3.48**).<sup>281</sup> Judging from the keenly observed features of the aged saint, shown in the final years of his life, and his resemblance to other known works of the same era, the painting can be dated to around 1635. Perhaps it was made to commemorate his death. Miyān Mīr is shown standing, facing to the left, in a flowering field against a dull background. As he gazes across the folio, a large malachite-colored shawl covering his stooped body, he holds a

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281 Toby Falk and Mildred Archer, *Indian Miniatures in the India Office Library*, 87-88, fig. 96ii.

leather-bound book, possibly as an offering. It is conceivable that the painting originally would have been paired with another saint shown receiving the book as a symbol of his becoming Miyān Mīr's successor.<sup>282</sup>

There are other examples of single portraits of saints in Shāh Jahānī albums, but most seem to have been made after 1640/41, the year of Dārā Shikoh and Jahānārā's initiation into Sufism. In the next chapter I will discuss some of these portraits in detail, arguing that the siblings played an active role in the development of later Shāh Jahān-period albums. Thus far, the possibility of imperial albums having multiple patrons has yet to be seriously considered by scholars.

Returning to the subject of Shāh Jahān's direct patronage, it is possible to map his devotional intentions by following images of one legendary saintly figure: the prophet Khizr. Earlier in the chapter I suggested that the figures of Mu'īn al-Dīn Chishtī and Khizr converged in a single portrait made for the emperor Jahāngīr (**Fig. 3.43**). Paintings of the green prophet in the Shāh Jahān period closely follow the iconography of the Jahāngīr-era portrait, further supporting my argument. To show how key historical events are animated with devotional significance I will highlight the figure of Khizr in the famous illustrations of the *Pādshāh-nāma*—the imperial history of Shāh Jahān—housed in the Windsor Castle collection (with paintings dating from circa 1635-1657).<sup>283</sup>

In Folio 192b from circa 1635, a holy man is placed at the center of the scene

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282 Many eighteenth century paintings show Miyān Mīr and Mullā Shāh standing in the same space suggesting that this was precisely the original intention of the Shāh Jahan period album folio. See for example, British Library's "Mian Mir and Mulla Shah" made in the style of Bahadur Singh, circa 1775. Toby Falk and Mildred Archer, *Indian miniatures in the India Office Library*, 253. Accession number J.1.19.

283 For the catalogue and a thorough discussion of the illustrations see, Milo Cleveland Beach, Ebba Koch, and W. M. Thackston, *King of the World: The Padshahnama: an Imperial Mughal Manuscript from the Royal Library, Windsor Castle* (London: Azimuth Editions, 1997).

surrounded by recognizable figures from the Mughal court (**Fig. 3.49**). The painting depicts an episode that occurred in November 1616, when Emperor Jahāngīr awarded Shāh Jahān (then known as Prince Khurram) the title of *Shāh*, thereby making him the official heir apparent.<sup>284</sup> We see Shāh Jahān bowing before the emperor, taking his leave as he prepares to depart for the Deccan. While all of the historical figures are painted in the opaque technique known as *gad rang*, the saintly figure in the center was made using the *siyāh qalam* technique of transparent washes. The two modes of painting are used to delineate two distinct spheres of reality coexisting in one shared space: the worldly and the sacred.<sup>285</sup> The ghostly figure flanked by hovering angels bears a striking resemblance to the figure of Muʿīn al-Dīn Chishtī handing over the metaphorical globe and key to Jahāngīr (**Fig. 3.50**). Here too, the saintly figure, looking to his left, is offering a golden globe, presumably to the future Shāh Jahān. While the worldly emperor bestows kingship in a bounded time and space—Ajmer, November 1616—the real, supra-temporal agent is God made present through the spectral figure of the *valī*. It is no coincidence that the space inhabited by the saint is green, further hinting at the identity of the bearded sage.

It becomes easier to identify the figure in folio 192b conclusively as Khizr when the portrait is compared to another representation of the prophet in folio 205b (**Fig. 3.51**). Although the page, made in circa 1656, is placed next to a text narrating Shāh Jahān's visit to Muʿīn al-Dīn's shrine in Ajmer in 1636, Ebba Koch has suggested that, given the ages of the emperor and Dārā Shikoh, who rides with him, it is clear "that what is

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284 Beach and Koch, *King of the World*, 92, 198, fig. 37.

285 I must thank Yael Rice for pointing out this possible difference, where saints are sometimes represented in the tinted technique, as if they were transparent, compared to the more "material" figures.



actually illustrated is the Emperor's last visit to Ajmer" in November 1654.<sup>286</sup> In the scene the aging emperor accompanied by the heir apparent suddenly encounters the ahistorical, mythic Khwāja Khizr floating on the river at the entrance of the sacred city of Ajmer. It is easy to identify him as the evergreen prophet because he is wearing green robes and is shown emerging from the waters of life. Even though Lāhawī's text of the *Pādhshāh-nāma* makes no reference to this encounter, the hovering green figure in the visual narrative yet again locates the historical event in a mythic moment. Khizr's apparition has alarmed the horses, who come to a sudden halt with their ears tilted back. With the holy city and *dargāh* visible behind him, the nimbused emperor is shown hovering between two worlds. His horse wades partially into the stream while its rear legs remain on the other bank. Khizr's presence transforms the stream into the waters of life, marking the space as the isthmus between this terrestrial world and the heavenly world beyond.

Koch and Beach have suggested that the painting is a representation of worldly conquest, with the figure of Khizr and the city of the patron saint of South Asia merely playing second fiddle to the "real" event of the conquest of Udaipur.<sup>287</sup> The painting however indicates exactly the opposite. I have already shown that historical and ahistorical events are repeatedly presented within one space throughout Mughal painting. In this instance, the presence of Khizr—appearing mysteriously before an aging emperor whose horse precariously hangs between two worlds—gives precedence to the ahistorical significance of the imagined encounter, rather than the historical event. The falcon of

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<sup>286</sup> Beach and Koch, *King of the World*, 205.

<sup>287</sup> "This pilgrimage was—as the historians tell us—not entirely motivated by religious piety but was seen as an occasion to suppress the unauthorized activities of Rana Raj Singh of Udaipur." Beach and Koch, *King of the World*, 205.

royalty, a sign of kingship, is comfortably perched on Dārā Shikoh's hand. Meanwhile the aged king is shown leaving the corporeal realm behind and entering the otherworldly realm. Perhaps the bestowal of the globe by Khizr in this case directly refers to the immortal world, or paradise.

This reading is all the more plausible when the *Pādshāh-nāma* folio is compared to a much earlier, simpler composition of the same theme (**Fig. 3.52**). This clearly allegorical painting, from around 1630 with later additions, shows a much younger Shāh Jahān in the middle of an ocean, standing on a magnificent white horse, receiving the cup of immortality from Khizr. This depiction would have been unimaginable under Akbar or Jahāngīr's patronage, even though its spiritual allegory owes much to Jahāngīr's pictorial innovations. In this instance there is no trace of the retinue or other conventional emblems of royal status. The emperor is shown alone, in Khizr's territory rather than in the material realm. The ocean here is unmistakably the ocean of immortality.

Khizr continued to feature in courtly albums as a bestower of eternal life and worldly kingship well into the nineteenth century (**Fig. 1.1**). His iconography and function, however, were codified in Shāh Jahān's court. It is my contention that the images that show Khizr offering Shāh Jahān the cup of immortality or the globe simultaneously bless the emperor's command over the kingdom of *ṣūrat* while granting him a place in God's kingdom of *ma'nī*.<sup>288</sup>

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288 Another *Padshahnama* folio, number 195a, contains a miniscule inscription that scholars have surprisingly missed. The painting depicts Jahangir investing a crown ornament, a *sarpech*, to Khurram, the future emperor Shah Jahan. Below the main scene in the balcony, on the fresco painted on the grey wall are two sufis emerging from behind the large hemispherical globe. The figure on the left with a rosary hanging from his belt is holding a sheathed sword, the only colored object in the fresco, as a clear gesture of investing kingship. The figure on the right holds an open manuscript that reads, "May your rule increase forever."

#### IV. Conclusion

For Akbar, Jahāngīr and Shāh Jahān figures of saints were instrumental for imperial self-fashioning in the context of royal manuscripts and albums. Each emperor employed devotional images according to their own programmatic needs. Akbar gradually appropriated the function of the *valī* as the bridge between the two worlds for himself. Jahāngīr utilized saints' images to sanction the king's role as pontiff. For Shāh Jahān, the saint played a far more layered and central role, both in his daily affairs and in paintings. This affinity passed on to his two favorite children.

In Dārā Shikoh's case, the religious and moral ideals that were taught through literary and visual metaphors and allegories became tools to model his intellectual life. For Jahānārā Begum, as she explains in her autobiography, religious devotion was a far more intimate experience. In the output of patrons such as Jahāngīr and Shāh Jahān mystical aspirations appear to have remained dormant, or couched within courtly life, whereas for Dārā Shikoh and Jahānārā Begum devotional ideals assumed central significance. When paired with the artworks they patronized the siblings' own writings show that they actively participated in Islamic devotionism by attaching themselves to *taṣawwuf*, thus making them exceptional in the long line of Mughal nobility. In the next chapter we will examine how their private spiritual practices and close personal association with living saints contributed to the coalescence of new forms of devotional expression.

## CHAPTER 4:

### Dārā Shikoh, Jahānārā Begum, Mullā Shāh and the Birth of a New Genre of Devotional Portraiture

*If it was possible for me to attain that Sun-like face  
What is kingship, I would claim godhood!*<sup>289</sup>

#### Introduction

In a folio from the *Late Shāh Jahān Album* (compiled 1650-58) a sufi saint dressed in a crisp white *jāma* is shown sitting under the shade of a tree on a high marble platform giving a sermon to a group of disciples (**Fig. 4.1**). The large, intricate border that surrounds the scene depicts a cohort of seven holy men of diverse lineages framed against a backdrop of magnificently illuminated plant life. The border figure on the top right reads from an open book to the sufi companion sitting across from him (**Fig. 4.2**). Minutely scribbled on the open pages of this tiny book is a Persian couplet, simple at first glance, but in fact linking the central subject of the painting to its imperial patrons.<sup>290</sup> So miniscule as to be nearly hidden in plain view, the verse can be translated as the following:

O king of the world (*Shāh Jahān*), you the possessor (*Dārā*)  
You the possessor (*Dārā*), you the world adorer (*Jahānārā*)

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289 Jahānārā Begum, *Risāla-i ṣāhibiyya*, 101. This is a couplet attributed to Abu Bakr Shiblī, a ninth-century sufi from Baghdad in the line of Junayd al-Baghdādī. He is also quoted by Dārā Shikoh in *Ḥasanāt al-‘arīfīn*, 23.

290 Leach. *Mughal and Other Indian Paintings From the Chester Beatty Library*, 447.

At first glance this couplet appears to address Shāh Jahān by three of his royal epithets: King, Possessor and Adorner of the World. However, through a clever play on words the verse also simultaneously addresses his two most beloved and influential children, prince and heir apparent Dārā Shikoh and his elder sister Jahānārā. The bearded sufi saint preaching to his disciples is none other than Mullā Shāh of the Qādirī *ṭarīqa*, the spiritual guide of the royal siblings. The couplet written on the tiny book in the margin of the folio is the opening to Mullā Shāh's *Risāla-i shāhiyya* (*Treatise of Shah*), completed in 1645.<sup>291</sup> Included in *the* royal album of its time, the verse—in which the two siblings are indirectly named as metaphorical extensions of the emperor—attests to the privileged status of Dārā Shikoh, Jahānārā and their guide Mullā Shāh.

The present chapter, which focuses on the patronage of the two children of Shāh Jahān, identifies the important sub-genre of saints' portraits made for an expressly devotional function. Having mapped conceptual frameworks, precedents and influences in the previous chapters, I now shift my discussion to identifying the moment of this genre's coalescence. I have divided the chapter into four sections. I will begin by highlighting Dārā Shikoh's role in the expansion of devotional painting in Mughal India as a teenage prince, discussing a key theme that emerges in the famous *Dārā Shikoh Album* (paintings circa 1630-1634), which he gifted to his fiancé Nādira Bānu Begum in 1641. This theme, which is a visual adaptation of the longstanding Persian literary convention of *shāhidbāzī*, or viewing God's beauty in human form, played a major role in the formation of the genre of sufi portraiture.

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291 Mullā Shāh, *Mathnawiyāt*, British Library Manuscript IO Islamic 578, f. 226b.

The second section focuses on Dārā Shikoh's initiation into the sufi order and the paintings that are linked to this event. I argue that these paintings were stylistically and iconographically fundamental in establishing the format of devotional portraits, which was copied, reinterpreted and transformed over subsequent decades across India.

In the third section I will examine the role of Jahānārā Begum, also known as Begum Šāḥiba, as a patron of sufi portraits, comparing some important paintings of Mullā Shāh with her autobiographical accounts and her own poetry. I will discuss how the image of the saint acts as a devotional object that mirrors her candid and intimate descriptions of the saint himself.

In the final section I will highlight key drawings and paintings of Mullā Shāh made circa 1640-1700 in order to map the spread of the genre across the Subcontinent in the early modern period. This map is supplemented by an appendix containing all of the known images of Mullā Shāh that I have collected during my research.

## **I. Dārā Shikoh and the Visualization of the Literary Trope of *Shāhidbāzī***

*When my head's eye looked into that meaning (ma'nī)  
I saw form (ṣūrat), but the soul saw meaning (ma'nī).  
I gaze at form (ṣūrat) with the eye of my head because  
Meaning (ma'nī) cannot be seen except in form (ṣūrat)*

(a follower of Ibn al-‘Arabī)<sup>292</sup>

By the early modern period, in addition to denoting a sufi lineage, the term “Qalandar” had become synonymous with a particular state of being and way of life. This way of life was typified by the famous example of Maulānā Rūmī's own master, Shams-i

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292 Zargar, *Sufi Aesthetics*, 103.

Tabrīz (d. circa 1250), who was regularly depicted dressed as a Qalandar. In a late-sixteenth-century Ottoman folio from the Topkapı Sarayı Museum illustrating a hagiography of Rūmī, Shams is shown as a dervish with pierced ears in front of the prideful Mawlānā who comes riding on a mule (**Fig. 4.3**).<sup>293</sup> Among Shams's coterie is a Qalandar—shown on the lower left of the page—holding a large animal horn, with the familiar burn marks lining his forearm. The famous lover-beloved and disciple-guide relationship that existed between Rūmī and Shams deepened an already established cultural precedent, in which the scholarly, exoteric and often proud disciple is finally freed from his pietistic shackles by an otherworldly Qalandar type: a guide who, having already united with God, is no longer fettered by conventional acts of religiosity. The ennobled Qalandarī way of life was permanently etched into the Muslim cultural imagination in numerous *ghazals* a century later by a poet recited even more widely in the Persianate world than Rūmī: Ḥāfiẓ Shīrāzī (d. 1389). Ḥāfiẓ makes his high opinion of the Qalandars evident when he says:

The Qalandars of Truth-Reality (*Ḥaqīqat*) never trade with the lukewarm,  
Those from whose craft a satin robe made is a disgrace<sup>294</sup>

Ḥāfiẓ suggests that the Qalandars are truly one with God, and that earthly pleasures and distractions are a disgrace to this model of detachment. The wisdom of these romantic medieval sufi poets was imparted to the children of nobility across the Persian-speaking Muslim world, and Prince Dārā Shikoh was no exception.<sup>295</sup> At least two paintings made

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<sup>293</sup> Michael Barry, *Figurative Art in Medieval Islam*, 279.

<sup>294</sup> Ḥāfiẓ Shīrāzī, Ghazal number 66, from his *Dīvān*. <https://ganjoor.net/hafez/ghazal/>

<sup>295</sup> In the introduction to his biography of saints, *Safīnat ul-awliyā'* (completed in 1640), Dārā Shikōh includes an entire section on this antinomian group. He concludes the section by quoting from a medieval

for him in his teenage years, from the *Dārā Shikoh Album*, show him facing an elderly sufi who is reciting the poetry of Ḥāfīz. The same album includes several exquisite portraits of Qalandars who are immediately recognizable by their paraphernalia and burn marks.

The representation of Qalandars is intrinsically linked to another devotional motif that was central to the self-fashioning of Mughal princes, from Akbar to Dārā Shikoh: the young monarch cast as the locus of God's manifestation. In folio 18 of the *Dārā Shikoh Album* (**Fig. 4.4**), the prince, probably in his early teenage years, appears to be busy in a lesson with his tutor Mullā 'Abd al-Laṭīf Sahāranpurī.<sup>296</sup> The Mullā is reading out from the *Dīvān* of Ḥāfīz. The open pages facing the viewer include a couplet that reads:

God is enclosed, as if in the pleasurable form of your eyebrows  
Enclosed, within my open actions, are your coqueties<sup>297</sup>

Similar to the artworks discussed in the preceding chapter, this painting must also be read on multiple levels, in tandem with its supporting text. In the most literal sense the painting depicts a poetry lesson. However, given what we know about the poet being recited as well as the interests of the young patron, another subtext gradually emerges: the theme of witnessing the divine in human form, and in particular as a beardless youth. As we shall see, this trope is repeated several times throughout the *Dārā Shikoh Album*.

Cyrus Zargar, in his seminal work on sufi aesthetics, explains that, “a movement within Sufism increasingly began to associate the *shahid* [a beautiful youth/literally the

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sufi, “Ibrahim Qaṣṣār said that there are two things most loved in the world: the first is the company of the dervishes, and the second to serve and love the Friends of God.” Dārā Shikoh, *Safinat ul-awliyā*, 22.

296 Losty and Roy, *Mughal India*, 130, Fig. 79.

297 Ḥāfīz, *ghazal* no. 32 from his *Dīvān*. <https://ganjoor.net/hafez/ghazal/sh32/>



locus of witnessing] with the human form, especially that of a beardless young man, and resulted in not only one of the most important poetic images in Sufi literature but also one of the most controversial practices of certain Sufis, namely, gazing at beautiful faces.”<sup>298</sup> One could add that this act, known in the Persianate world as *shāhidbāzī*, also contributed to one of the most popular visual tropes in Persian and Indian painting.<sup>299</sup> Popularized by Persian poets, *shāhidbāzī* was legitimized within sufi circles when medieval sufis such as Ahmad Ghazālī (1059-1111), ‘Ayn al-Quḍat Ḥamadānī (1098-1131) and Awḥad al-Dīn al-Kirmānī (1163-1238) linked it to several apocryphal Prophetic sayings. One contested *Ḥadīth*, cited by none other than Ibn al-‘Arabī, says: “I saw my Lord in the form of a beardless youth, wearing a cloak of gold, upon his head a crown of gold, and upon his feet sandals of gold.”<sup>300</sup> Medieval poets such as Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār, Ḥāfīz, Fakhrudīn ‘Irāqī, Amīr Khusro and Ruzbihān Baqlī regularly alluded to this Prophetic saying and contributed to the act of *shāhidbāzī* becoming a popular convention in both literature and painting. In an essay Jim Wafer elaborates on Ruzbihān’s vision of God in the form of a beardless youth thus:

In a state of ecstasy the great shaykh Ruzbihān Baqli of Shiraz said: I saw God in the form of a Turk, with a silk cap, which he wore awry. I gripped the hem of His robe and spoke: By the unity of Your [God’s] being! In

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<sup>298</sup> Zargar, *Sufi Aesthetics*, 85.

<sup>299</sup> The fundamental function of *shāhidbāzī* is to gaze at form, “with the physical ‘head’s eye’, and seeing meaning *only* through form.” Zargar, *Sufi Aesthetics*, 103.

<sup>300</sup> William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 396, f.n. 3. See also, Annemarie Schimmel, *As Through a Veil: Mystical Poetry in Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 67-68. Other sayings of the Prophet popularized by sufis who sought to justify the act of witnessing God’s beauty in human form include, “Beware of gazing at beardless youths, for truly theirs is a color like the color of God,” and, “I saw my Lord on the Night of Mi’raj in the form of a beardless adolescent with short, curly hair.” Zargar, *Sufi Aesthetics*, 93.

whatever form You appear and in whatever form You show yourself to the loving eye, I will recognize You behind it.<sup>301</sup>

It should be added that the act of *shāhidbāzī*, though transgressive-sounding even in the original Persian, was, for the most part, a “platonic appreciation of divine beauty in human forms, one affected by a preexisting cultural appreciation for the beauty of beardless young men,” and not necessarily a sexual act.<sup>302</sup> The practice is intrinsically linked to the superiority given by both Qalandarī and *Akbarian* sufis to God’s love; the love which is reciprocated by the lover with passionate ardor known as *‘ishq*. Even before Ibn al-‘Arabī, love was described as the essence of God and the vehicle of all creation by the great theologian-turned-sufi, Aḥmad Ghazālī.<sup>303</sup> In fact, it was Ghazālī who first emphasized that the starting point of love between the human lover and divine beloved begins with vision, and its resulting act of viewing, *naẓar*. Thus, for many sufis, the act of viewing a beautiful face became the spark that lit the heart with the fire of longing for God: “an outlook in which Love is the axis of all creation and witnessing or gazing at beauty allows one entry into the presence of Love.”<sup>304</sup> Or as Dārā Shikoh

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301 Jim Wafer, “Vision and Passion: the Symbolism of Male Love in Islamic Mystical Literature,” in *Islamic Homosexualities: Culture, History, and Literature*, ed. Stephen O Murray, and Will Roscoe (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 123. For another translation of this anecdote see, Hellmut Ritter, John O’Kane, and Bernd Radtke, *The Ocean of the Soul: Man, the World, and God in the Stories of Farīd Al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 462.

302 “Nevertheless, there is nothing to suggest that the gnostics discussed were insincere in their claims that it was for them a practice devoid of licentiousness. In fact, never do the texts... refer to *shāhidbāzī* as pederasty.” Zargar, *Sufi Aesthetics*, 119; and “...the complimentary ideals of sincerity and adventure, rooted in the image of the Qalandar, helped render the censurable vice of enjoying the company of beautiful young men into an antinomian virtue.” Zargar, 114.

303 Zargar, *Sufi Aesthetics*, 88.

304 Zargar, *Sufi Aesthetics*, 89.

himself explains in *Sakīnat al-awliyā*, “he who has seen a chivalrous man (*javānmard*; literally, a “manly” man) has not seen him but has seen God.”<sup>305</sup>

The popular Indian sufi poet Amīr Khusro (1253-1325) gave the awry-capped beloved evoked by Ruzbihān Baqlī a new twist, as a metaphor for the *qibla* (direction toward the Ka’ba; place of worship) of the devotee. Jahāngīr in his memoirs mentions a recital in his court in which this verse of Khusro was performed:

Every tribe has a rightly guided path, a religion, and a *qibla*  
I straighten my *qibla* in the direction of the one with his cap awry<sup>306</sup>

After Khusro, Ḥāfīz further popularized this theme across the Persian-speaking world. In his poetry he often identifies himself with the rakish, Qalandar-like libertine, known as the *rend*. In one couplet he pronounces:

Behold the insistent breeze, like the rakish *shāhidbāz*,  
Sometimes grabbing the rose’s lips, and sometimes the grass’s hair<sup>307</sup>

Seen through this lens, the *Dārā Shikoh Album* folio (**Fig. 4.4**) becomes far more narratively nuanced than a mere school lesson. The sage-like Mullā ‘Abd al-Laṭīf is

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305 Dārā Shikoh, *Sakīnat ul-awliyā*, 18. In the Ottoman and Persian cases, the beardless boy is celebrated with similar language in love poetry of a more earthly type and there is indeed a sexual element, though it may not imply consummation but rather longing. This is also the case with romantic Persian poetry written in Mughal India. Usually the spiritual and carnal meanings are interwoven, leaving the audience to prize out whichever meaning they prefer. For a discussion of this theme in sixteenth century Ottoman Turkey see, Walter G. Andrews, and Mehmet Kalpaklı, *The Age of Beloveds: Love and the Beloved in Early-Modern Ottoman and European Culture and Society* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005). I am grateful to Amanda Phillips for pointing out this connection.

306 Jahangir, *The Jahangirnama: Memoirs of Jahangir, Emperor of India*, translated by Wheeler Thackston (New York: Freer Gallery of Art, Arthur M. Sackler Gallery in association with Oxford University Press, 1999), 109. For a lengthier discussion on this theme see, Shahab Ahmad, *What is Islam?* 202-206.

307 Ḥāfīz Shirazi, *Qaṣīda number 3, In Praise of Shāh Shaykh Abu Ishāq*, <https://ganjoor.net/hafez/ghaside/sh3/>.

seated in a meditation posture with a scarf wrapped around his knees to prop him up. The stage on which the two figures are seated is further demarcated by the aged scholar's positioning on a white, embroidered spread (*chāndinī*). Similar to the *jōgī* in the *Salīm Album*, the saintly figure is haloed by a green bush. A slender tree that extends into the upper border provides him with shade while some plucked roses, perhaps a gift from the youth, lie scattered at his feet. Curled up below the prince is a content-looking white cat. The scene takes place by an idyllic riverbank, with a nearby town receding into the misty background. The blue skies are tinted with golden clouds, hinting that the imagined moment is early morning. Meanwhile the sufi Mullā holds the open *Dīvān* of Ḥāfīz in his left hand, and counts a rosary with his right. While the green bush haloing the figure and the black rosary hint at the devotional undercurrent of the painting, the clearest signifier is the already quoted couplet itself, in particular the first hemistich: "God is enclosed, as if in the pleasurable form of your eyebrows." The beardless princely youth, through the beauty of his form, thus becomes the old ascetic's *qibla* for the manifestation of God. The mutual gaze, which is precisely the act of *naẓar*, allows the sufi to drink in this revelation of God's beauty, so that—as the second hemistich proclaims—*enclosed, within my open actions, are your coqueties*. In addition to being a portrait of the young heir apparent engaged in a lesson, the painting is an illustration of the Ḥāfīz couplet, and recapitulates a favorite devotional motif regularly found in both literary and visual examples.

There are two other instances from the same period, possibly by the same artist, in which a young Dārā Shikoh is shown in the company of sufis gathered during a recital or lesson for the prince. The examples come from an album in the collection of the Bodleian

Library that contains several Shāh Jahān-period paintings (**Figs. 4.6 and 4.7**).<sup>308</sup> The two pages, placed facing each other, share a similar setting, with the same raised platform. In both paintings, the black paradisal carpet is seething with energy, as if the world of imaginal forms (*‘ālam-i khyāl*) had sprung to life. Seated atop this teeming carpet are figures of sufis casually lounging, reciting poetry. In **Fig. 4.6** the scholar-dervishes are seated around the youthful prince Dārā Shikoh.

J.P. Losty has suggested that many representations of youths in idyllic landscapes in the *Dārā Shikoh Album* can be identified with the prince himself.<sup>309</sup> If that is indeed the case, perhaps God’s self-disclosure is deliberately represented in the person of the young prince. This seems all the more likely for folios in which he is shown facing a sufi elder. The motif of the prince as locus of divine radiance was apparent during the Salīm (Jahāngīr) period, with precedents that can be traced back to Akbar himself. The princely Akbar visited by a Qalandarī sufi in the ‘Abdul Ṣamad *nīm qalam* (**Fig. 3.10**), discussed at length in the previous chapter, is one of the prototypes for this subject. It was under Akbar’s patronage that the premise of witnessing God’s beauty in the form of a beardless youth first corresponded with the reign of a youthful prince or king in Mughal India.<sup>310</sup>

The same subject can be seen in a painting from the *Salīm Album*, signed by Mirzā Ghulām, which shows a drunken beardless youth as an ideal of beauty and

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308 Bodleian Library, catalogue of Persian, [&c] Mss. Bodleian Library, Part II, 2381.

309 Jeremiah Losty, “The Dara Shikoh Album: A Reinterpretation,” paper given at the workshop *The Mughal Empire under Shah Jahan* (Vienna, 26-27 May, 2014).

310 In a much later example, Mullā Shāh, in a panegyric poem, praises Emperor Shah Jahan thus: “Your heart is (itself) such an illumination of Paradise / That it has laid to waste the Garden of Paradise / Your heart is the exceptional seat for God’s manifestation / You, the Sun, are both the Sun and the lamp.” Mullā Shāh, *Muṣannifāt-i Mullā Shāh*, folio 20v.

elegance (**Fig. 4.8**).<sup>311</sup> The tiny Persian inscription above the figure's head reads "Shāh Salīm." In this example the young prince dons a disheveled turban as a sign of his drunkenness, a direct allusion to the awry cap of Ruzbihān's beloved.<sup>312</sup> A couplet from another Ḥāfiẓ *ghazal* frames the image:

We have seen the reflection of the cheek of our friend in the cup  
Oh! The enjoyment of drinking has made us eternally heedless.<sup>313</sup>

An even clearer example of Prince Salīm assuming the function of God's *tajallī* (self-disclosure) comes from a *Gulshan Album* (1610/1611) folio in the Musée Guimet (**Fig. 4.9**). In this instance the prince, with short mustache and pouting lips, is once again unmistakably Salīm. He is shown seated on a rocky dais, reading from an open book. His right foot is folded underneath him while his left foot rests on a rocky "foot stool" that acts as a pedestal. Most importantly, a bubbling spring emerges from under the pedestal, watched intently by a submissive dog with a collar. A tree also shades Salīm: in this case, a slender sapling gently arching over the figure. Many of the familiar devotional symbols are present in this one image. The poem in the frame is a quatrain by the twelfth-century panegyrist Rashid al-Dīn Vatvāt (d. 1182), and reads:

I hear of your scent from the breeze, and I faint  
I hear your name from the cosmos, and I swoon  
When I speak, the first word is "You,"  
You are my very thoughts, thus I remain silent<sup>314</sup>

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311 See, Wright and Stronge, *Muraqqa'*, 56. Also see Pratapaditya Pal, *Indian Painting*, vol.1 (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1993).

312 Amnia Okada has preferred to call it a "portrait of a courtier" without giving any explanation for it. However, she also takes the representation to depict "divine beauty as glimpsed—or sensed—through the earthly beauty of a handsome youth." Okada, *Indian Miniatures of the Mughal Court*, 113.

313 Ḥāfiẓ, *ghazal* number 10. <https://ganjoor.net/hafeez/ghazal/sh11/>

314 Rashid ul-Din Vatvāt's Ruba'i number 34 from his *Taghazzul*. <https://ganjoor.net/vatvat/robov/sh34/>

We are left wondering to whom the verses refer. Is the pining lover the prince, reading out from the open book, remembering the name of his separated beloved? Or is the lover the beholder of the folio peering at the young beardless beloved who sits posing on his rocky throne, with the fountain of life gushing from his feet? I would argue that in the two *Salīm/Jahāngīr*-period examples given above, the relationship between text and image creates a tension in which the subject and object mirror each other, most clearly witnessed in the previously discussed *Salīm Album* folio containing these lines:

We have seen the reflection of the cheek of our friend in the cup  
Oh! The enjoyment of drinking has made us eternally heedless.

Is the Narcissus-like lover witnessing the beloved by looking at his own reflection in the cup? In these circular visual narratives the separated lover becomes the locus for the divine beloved through his own presence as the beardless prince who is gazed at, in turn, by the beholder of the album, or, in the case of the *Dārā Shikoh Album* example, by a sufi sitting across from him. Gazing upon the representation of this heavenly disclosure, the sufi/viewer in turn has the potential to realize God-knowledge within himself, thereby becoming himself a focal point for the staging of mystical emanation. Or as Ghazālī exclaims in his *Sawānih*:

Oh idol! I thought you were my beloved  
Now, as I keep looking, I see that you are none but my soul<sup>315</sup>

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315 Zargar, *Sufi Aesthetics*, 89. "...there is the confusion between the beautiful beloved and the poet's own soul... This alludes to the true unity of lover and beloved, and intimates that the soul exists only to witness and love." Priscilla Soucek has also discussed Ghazālī's possible role in establishing the function of portraiture in Islamic culture. "He discusses several types of beauty and the manner in which they are perceived by the senses, in an ascending progression that moves from the beauty of man to that of the creation and finally focuses on how to define God's beauty. The faculty of sight and the related skill of visual imagination are important aspects of this process. The eye is attracted to beauty and takes pleasure

Since these examples are illustrating distiches from Persian *ghazals*, another way to “read” the imagery is through the symbolic lexicon of classical poetry.<sup>316</sup> Within the Persian and Urdu *ghazal* framework the object of desire—usually possessing an unspecified gender—is understood to embody both the metaphorical (*majāzī*) and real (*ḥaqīqī*) beloved. Both meanings coexist, with the metaphorical leading to the archetypal. A highly skilled poet such as Ḥāfīz maintained this ambiguity between the levels of meaning consistently throughout his oeuvre, much to the thrill of his audience. The synchronicity of dual meanings can be likened to a viewer in a chamber looking through a latticed screen into a garden. If one concentrates on the screen the intricacies of the carving come into focus and the garden beyond becomes a blur; conversely, if one looks *through* the screen the garden suddenly becomes clear, and the screen disappears. It is what Ibn al-‘Arabī has famously called, “seeing with both eyes,” the eye of *tashbīḥ* (likeness; immanence) and the eye of *tanzīḥ* (abstraction; transcendence).<sup>317</sup>

In fact, the Persian and Mughal album as a whole can be thought of as a visual *ghazal*. If we follow Daryush Shayegan’s brilliant description of the structure of the

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from its perception. Only the weak focus exclusively on external appearances because the essential beauty of man’s creations such as poetry, painting (*al-naqsh*), and architecture reflect the inner qualities of the poet, painter (*al-naqqāsh*), and builder. The degree of the pleasure derived from the contemplation of beauty is proportional to the love it arouses. Thus the more attractive a face, the greater one’s pleasure in contemplating it. Given the superiority of sight over smell, it is logical that examining a handsome face (or portrait) (*ṣūrat jamīla*) is more pleasurable than the scent of perfume.” See, Priscilla Soucek, “The Theory and Practice of Portraiture in the Persian Tradition, *Muqarnas*, vol. 17 (2000): 102. However, rather than acknowledging the conception of portraiture as an intrinsically Islamic phenomena, Soucek attempts to find its source in Neoplatonic thought and Greek texts.

316 *Ghazal*—the most popular genre of classical poetry—is a lyric poem with a fixed number of verses and repeated rhyme, often set to music. The individual verses are understood to exist independently of each other without necessarily having any unifying thematic element apart from the formal structure.

317 “...the writings of Ibn ‘Arabi consistently emphasize perceiving two realities at once: The cosmos and all in it is he, but it is also not he. God has appointed for each person two eyes, with which each person should be cognizant of God as cosmos, on the one hand, and cosmos as cosmos, on the other.” Zargar, *Sufi Aesthetics*, 27.



*ghazal*, but replace the words “*ghazal*” and “distich” with “album” and “folio,” we have an excellent description of the *muraqqa*’ picture album:

Each *folio* is a complete whole, a world; within the *album* one *folio* is not joined chronologically to the next, but is synchronically consubstantial with it. It is like a world within a larger world...from one *folio* to the next, the same tonalities are amplified on extended registers, calling forth magical correspondences at every level.”<sup>318</sup>

As with the classical *ghazal*, the *Dārā Shikoh Album* has various “tonalities” under the overarching theme of love and witnessing. One particular timbre is “amplified on extended registers” by repeating it at least thrice.<sup>319</sup> In these double-page compositions a sufi in the left-hand folio is shown meditating on a beardless youth situated on the facing folio. Two of the three double pages clearly depict Qalandars. In folio 48 (**Fig. 4.10**) the Qalandar seated on a raised dais is shown holding an open book in his left hand, which once again provides the key to unlock the underlying theme of the double pages.

The dervish can be identified as a Qalandar from the three burn marks on his exposed right arm. He also has a wooden begging bowl (*kashkūl*) hanging from his belt. He is dressed as a *rend*, the familiar wandering ecstasies who wore rough, woolen clothes and roamed around barefoot. He has a floppy woolen cap with flowers attached to a rakishly wound white turban, and a coarse meditation stick carved in the shape of a deer. With his right hand he is pointing to the figure across the page while his beseeching eyes gaze in his direction. The open book has a minute couplet—by none other than Ḥāfiẓ—scribbled on the pages:

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318 Daryush Shayegan, “The Visionary Topography of Ḥafiz,” in *The green sea of heaven: fifty ghazals from the Dīwān of Ḥāfiẓ*, translated by Elizabeth T. Gray (Ashland, Or: White Cloud Press, 1995), 17.

319 *Dārā Shikoh Album*, British Library, Add Or 3129, folios 43-48. For a detailed discussion of the *Dārā Shikoh Album* see, Jeremiah P. Losty, and Malini Roy, *Mughal India*, 124-137.

God is Great:  
 O That they (the Beloved) would turn their alchemical gaze towards this  
 [speck of] dust,  
 O that they would turn a corner of their eye towards us<sup>320</sup>

Across the page, on folio 47v (**Fig. 4.11**), the figure to whom this verse is addressed is a youthful prince dressed in a flashing gold *jāma* and red turban, daintily holding a blue iris. He too is seated on a similar dais as the Qalandar, but with a lavish blue carpet with yellow borders. One cannot help but think of the boy “with a cloak of gold” mentioned earlier in the *Ḥadīth* of the Prophet. In this double page the devotional intent is far more transparent. A sufi deep in the act of *shāhidbāzī* is imploring the beloved to reciprocate his gaze. In the other two double folios the same motif is repeated but with subtle variations.

All three double pages of the album contain couplets in the borders. All of them are part of a single passage from the first mystical-didactic *mathnavī* written in Persian, *Ḥadīqat al-Ḥaqīqa*, by the twelfth-century sufi poet Sanā’i (d. 1131). The sections used in the *Dārā Shikoh Album* pages are from the beginning of the eighth chapter, which is a eulogy for the Afghan ruler Bahrām Shāh, to whom the opus is dedicated, and deal with the early phase of the ruler’s kingship. In this section the young shāh is compared to the Qur’ānic Yusef, who is the archetype of all human beauty. The careful selection of this passage, and its dispersal in pages that specifically represent a young prince being gazed upon by sufi dervishes, together show, beyond any doubt, that Mughal royalty—and in

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320 Ḥāfiz, ghazal number 196. <https://ganjoor.net/hafez/ghazal/sh196/>

particular the heirs apparent—were cultivated to believe in their own aura as God-manifesting vehicles.<sup>321</sup>

## II. Dārā Shikoh and the Qādirī Circle of Miyān Mīr

*Being in the presence of the Friends of God awards closeness with God; seeking them out is akin to yearning for God; association with them is association and proximity to God.*

(Dārā Shikoh)<sup>322</sup>

In 1634 the twenty-year-old Dārā Shikoh fell gravely ill. When no doctor could find a cure his father took him to Lahore to visit the greatest sufi authority of the time in India, Miyān Mīr (1550-1635). According to Dārā the saint prayed and breathed over a cup of water, offering it to him to drink. Within a week he had recovered.<sup>323</sup> This brief contact with Miyān Mīr left a deep mark on Dārā Shikoh's life.<sup>324</sup> Less than a year later, in August 1635, the great sage breathed his last. The years 1634-35 proved to be a major turning point for Dārā. The latent devotional sensibility inherited through his royal upbringing and glimpsed in his early years flowered into a particular focus on the lineage and legacy of Miyān Mīr and his Qādirī order of Sufism. This is the period when the prince plunged himself into hagiographic literature and began compiling a seminal biography of Muslim saints in the longstanding Persian *tazkira* tradition. To this day his

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321 There are countless examples of this theme throughout Mughal and Mughal-influenced painting in India. For a discussion of Qalandars in India in the medieval period see, Simon Digby, "Qalandars and Related Groups: Elements of Social Deviance in the Religious Life of the Delhi Sultanate of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries," in Yohanan Friedmann, ed. *Islam in Asia*, vol. I (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1984), 60-108.

322 Dārā Shikoh, *Safinat al-awliya'*, 17-19.

323 Dārā Shikoh, *Safinat al-awliya'*, 104.

324 In *Sakinat al-awliya'* Dārā Shikoh mentions one more visit that he made with Shah Jahan to Mian Mir's abode. By this time he explains that his ardor for the great saint had increased. He took his shoes off before entering the precinct, and placed his head at Miyān Mīr's feet asking for his prayers. Dārā Shikoh, *Sakinat al-awliya'*, 43-44.

*Safīnat al-awliyāʾ*, or *The Ship of the Friends of God* (completed 1640), is considered to be one of the most important *tazkirāt* written in Muslim India. At the same time he began an even more focused literary project: writing an account of the lives of Miyān Mīr and his own guide Mullā Shāh, titled *Sakīnat al-awliyāʾ*, or the *Repose of the Friends of God* (completed 1642). Miyān Mīr's passing away led Dārā Shikoh to the guidance of his successor, Mullā Shāh, who was based in Kashmir. After five years of preparation Dārā was finally initiated into the Qādirī order on April 21, 1640 (Ẓu'l Ḥijjah, 29, 1049 AH). From this point onward he used the pen name "Dārā Shikoh Ḥanafī Qādirī."<sup>325</sup>

In his two biographical volumes, written during this crucial period of personal transition, the prince's self-projection as a future philosopher-king comes to the fore. As we have seen, princes, and the heirs apparent in particular, were cultivated to view themselves as divinely chosen vehicles of God. Similarly, Dārā—the burgeoning mystic—sincerely believed that his path was ordained by heaven. In his introduction to *Sakīnat al-awliyāʾ* he explains how a few months prior to his initiation an angel came to him in a dream and pronounced four times: "God most high will grant you such a gift as has not been given to any emperor on the face of this earth." The gift, as he understood it, was the path of *taṣavvuf*.

The prince's transition from a spiritual seeker to an actual traveler (*sālik*) is reflected in drawings and paintings from this time as well. Two artworks in particular, made for Dārā Shikoh between 1635 and 1640, are key for understanding the formation of the genre of sufi portraiture. Importantly, they illustrate the key concept of *dīdār*, the sufi equivalent of the Sanskrit term *darśan*, or spiritual viewing. In the *Sakīnat al-awliyāʾ*

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<sup>325</sup> "Hanafī" is one of the four schools of Sunni Islam. Most South Asian Muslims follow the Hanafī creed.

Dārā includes a short passage that narrates the importance of “viewing” in Sufism. To support his argument he quotes from the medieval sufi master of Herat, Khwāja Abdullah Anṣārī (d.1088), who says, “viewing (*dīdār*) of the saints is obligatory on this group (the sufis), because only from this viewing can they acquire that which cannot be acquired by any other means.”<sup>326</sup> During this germinal phase of portraits made for an expressly devotional purpose, figures of saints and their followers are shown facing each other, engrossed in the act of viewing.

A drawing that is critical for understanding the motivational shift in royal patronage for devotional portraiture is also one of the earliest known representations of Miyān Mīr and his close circle of disciples (**Fig. 4.12**). In this group portrait included in the collection of the Walters Museum, the Qādirī *shaykh* and his five prominent disciples are shown facing each other and are all clearly identified with Persian inscriptions. The identity of most of the figures can be further verified through contemporary biographical sources, including Dārā’s biographies and Jahānārā’s *Ṣāhibiyya*. The figures, clockwise from the top-right, are identified as “Ḥaẓrat Miyān Shāh Mīr,” “Ḥaẓrat Mullā Khwāja,” “Shāh Muḥammad Dilrubā,” “Shāh Khiyālī,” “Miyān Abu’l Mu’ālī” and “Mullā Shāh.” Since Miyān Mīr was known as Shāh Mīr or Miyān Jīv during his lifetime and only became popularly known as Miyān Mīr later, the inscriptions are likely to be contemporaneous with the production of the drawing. They have been instrumental in helping me identify later individual portraits of Miyān Mīr’s disciples.

The artist who made the six portraits worked in a style that is immediately recognizable for its bold draftsmanship (**Figs. 4.13 and 4.14**). All of the faces are

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<sup>326</sup> Dārā Shikoh, *Sakīnat al-awliyā’*, 18.

delineated with quick, deft brushstrokes. Instead of utilizing the more common stippling technique known as *pardākht* the artist has rendered the drawing with minute lines. Darker areas are given form with crosshatching. Every curl and tuft of hair is executed with swift, animated marks. It is probable that one of the artists who worked on the *Dārā Shikoh Album* was responsible for this drawing, which bears some stylistic resemblance to **Figure 4.4**, the folio in which the teenage prince is paired with his sufi tutor. Although it was made with opaque watercolors in what is known as the *gad rang* technique—which requires a far more subtle approach to rendering—the portrait of Mullā ‘Abd al-Laṭīf (**Fig. 4.15**) shows line work and crosshatching similar to that seen in the drawing of Miyān Mīr’s circle. The unique detail of the tufts of hair sneaking out from under the Mullā’s turban can also be seen in the portrait of Shāh Dilrubā from the Walters Museum drawing (**Fig. 4.14**).

Contemporary portraits of Mullā Shāh were made throughout the period of over two decades that Dārā Shikoh and Jahānārā Begum were in direct contact with the Qādirī order, between 1635 and 1659—the year that Dārā was executed by Aurangzeb. When the known portraits are arranged chronologically different phases of the saint’s life can be mapped. It is clear, for instance, that the Mullā gradually ages from the earliest portrait to the latest. In the Walters Museum drawing he is shown with robust features, black eyebrows and mustache, and greying hair. This is in contrast to a later portrait from the Freer-Sackler Galleries in which his hair is completely white and his forehead is marked with wrinkles (**Fig. 4.16**). Given the possibility that an artist contributing to the *Dārā Shikoh Album* was responsible for the Walters Museum drawing, and the fact that Mullā Shāh is shown at his youngest when compared to other known portraits, the Walters

drawing can be confidently dated between 1634—the year in which Dārā Shikoh first met Miyān Mīr and his Qādirī circle—and 1640—the year of his initiation.

Textual evidence has helped me further refine the dating for the group portrait. In *Ḥasanāt al-‘arīfīn*, completed in 1652, Dārā Shikoh mentions that Shāh Dilrubā, with whom he kept a regular correspondence through letters, went into seclusion, refusing to show his face to anyone.<sup>327</sup> According to Dārā, the sage expressed this desire a few years prior to his writing the book. Artists could therefore only have captured his likeness prior to his seclusion. As the reader will recall, Shāh Dilrubā was depicted among the circle of Miyān Mīr disciples gathered in the Walters Museum drawing, further supporting my claim of an earlier date for the origin of the work.

Furthermore, in *Sakīnat al-awliyā’* Dārā included a letter written by Mullā Shāh to one of his disciples in which it becomes clear that Shāh Abu’l Mu’ālī, another one of the five disciples of Miyān Mīr in the Walters Museum drawing, had a falling out with Mullā Shāh and was no longer a member of his inner circle.<sup>328</sup> Since *Sakīnat al-awliyā’* was completed in 1642 and the letter included preceded it, a drawing in which Mullā Shāh is shown seated next to Abu’l Mu’ālī would most likely have been made for the royal patron at an earlier moment when the two sages were still companions. Lastly, we know that after Miyān Mīr’s death in 1635, Mullā Shāh, who was his successor, gradually stopped making his annual trips to Lahore. By the 1640s he was completely stationed in Kashmir, where he would remain until the last, brief phase of his life.

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327 Dārā Shikoh, *Ḥasanāt*, 73. “...these days he is in seclusion, and does not see anyone’s face. Anyone who goes to see him, he speaks to them from behind a veil. A few years prior to this he told me that he wishes to never show his face to anyone...”

328 Dārā Shikoh, *Sakīnat al-awliyā’*, 145.

It is very likely that during Shāh Jahān and Dārā Shikoh's two visits to Miyān Mīr's *khānqāh* in Lahore in 1534-35 artists also accompanied the entourage. As evidenced by Mughal-period paintings in which the artist can be seen sketching in an assembly, this appears to have been a routine occurrence.<sup>329</sup> It is also likely that the artists would have made portraits of Miyān Mīr and those disciples who were gathered around him at that time. The Walters Museum drawing is one such example. It was probably synthesized from various individual sketches into a final composition closer to the time of Dārā's initiation in 1640. This is more likely, given that the drawing was used as a template for a stately painting showing Dārā Shikoh in the circle of Miyān Mīr and his Qādirī followers, which can be dated to around 1640 (**Fig. 4.17**). Later in this chapter I will discuss the painting's function, arguing that it was made to commemorate Dārā Shikoh's initiation into the Qādirīyya. Based on the evidence at hand, the Walters Museum drawing's date can be pinpointed to circa 1638-1640.

In both the drawing and the circa 1640 painting there is a deliberate staging of the figures, a trend more often seen in album folios depicting portraits of the nobility. In previous paintings of sufīs, such as those made for Jahāngīr and for the young Dārā Shikoh, figures are shown both in profile and in three-quarter views, often in a more relaxed manner. In drawings and paintings focusing on Miyān Mīr, Mullā Shāh and other disciples the main characters are always shown in profile. Rather than inhabiting a believable, naturalistic space—as was increasingly the case from the Salīm period onward—the saints hover, silently meditating upon their companions' countenances in a static space and time.

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329 See for example folio 19v of *Kitāb-i-Masnavīyyāt-i-Zafar Khan*, Royal Asiatic Society, RAS Persian 310.



This sense of timelessness is wonderfully captured in what I have dubbed the “initiation painting,” more commonly known as “Dārā Shikoh with Miyān Mīr and Mullā Shāh,” which Milo Beach has attributed to the court artist La’lchand (**Fig. 4.17**). The painting follows the basic format of the Walters Museum drawing, but with some modifications. The figures form a far more intimate circle, reminiscent of a sufi gathering known variously as a *majlis*, *mehfil*, *halqa* or *dāira*. To this day, all over the world, sufis gather in *halqas* around a *shaykh* or one of his representatives, while performing prescribed communal invocatory rituals. The *majlis* usually begins with either a sermon by the leader of the gathering or a question and answer session concerning some aspect of the spiritual path. In the painting Mullā Shāh is shown addressing Miyān Mīr with a raised finger. Next to him, in a bright orange *jāma*, blood-red turban with a green sash, and a thin diaphanous muslin scarf draped around his shoulders is Dārā Shikoh, seated obediently with his hands folded on his lap (**Fig. 4.18**). Along with the master and disciple, the prince shares the central stage-like space—demarcated by the white carpet—with Mullā Khwāja, one of the closest companions of Miyān Mīr. In the Walters Museum drawing Abu’l Mu’ālī is shown sitting next to Mullā Shāh; in the initiation painting he has been shifted below, with Dārā inserted between them. Shāh Khyālī is now seated on the other side of the circle, immediately across from Abu’l Mu’ālī. Shāh Dilrubā, whom Dārā considered one of his closest guides, is absent from the scene. Three other as yet unidentified disciples now occupy the lower register of the composition, which was left empty in the earlier drawing. Another addition to the painting is a servant shown at the top right fanning Miyān Mīr with a *morchhal* peacock fan. Is it possible that the painting

depicts, apart from the deceased Miyān Mīr, the sufi brethren who were present during Dārā Shikoh's actual initiation ceremony?

Although the painting may take references from individual portraits of saints that were originally drawn from direct observation, as a whole it can be interpreted as an imagined representation of an ahistorical gathering. A meeting between Dārā Shikoh alone with Miyān Mīr and his disciples never actually took place. The two occasions that the prince visited the *khānqāh* were with his father, the emperor Shāh Jahān, in 1634 and 1635. Shortly after these visits Miyān Mīr passed away. Furthermore, the scene depicted here cannot be an historical event because in all portraits prior to 1640 Dārā Shikoh is shown beardless. This is one of the first instances in which he is shown with a beard, representing his entry into full maturity. The artist consciously positions Dārā next to the prince's own guide and initiator, Mullā Shāh, who is shown introducing the young aspirant to the great—by this time, deceased—saint. Of all the figures gathered it is only Miyān Mīr, Mullā Shāh and Dārā Shikoh who appear with haloes.

Taking the historical, symbolic and contextual evidence into account, I interpret the painting as a commemoration of Dārā Shikoh's entry into the Qādirī *ṭarīqa*. Milo Beach dates the painting to circa 1640, the period of Dārā and Jahanārā entering the sufi path, further supporting my theory that it is a representation of the rite of initiation.<sup>330</sup> Dārā's refined apparel highlights his royal status while the red and green turban and the henna-like vermillion of his *jāma* subtly evoke traditional Indian bridal colors. In Indian sufi literature and folk culture the rite of initiation into a brotherhood is often described as a spiritual marriage. An identical painting from the same period is included in the *Nāṣir*

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330. Milo Beach, *The Imperial Image*, 164.

*al-Dīn Shāh Album* in Tehran.<sup>331</sup> The existence of the second painting bears witness to the importance of this ahistorical visualization of the initiatic rite of passage.

In addition to being biographically significant, this painting was in many ways pivotal for the expansion of the genre of sufi portraiture. There are several paintings from the mid-seventeenth century to the nineteenth century that depict Miyān Mīr and Mullā Shāh together. Most of them are based on the composition of the initiation painting, preserving some of its highly specific personal details. For example, Miyān Mīr is repeatedly shown holding his left shoulder with the other hand on his knee (**Fig. 4.19**). This can be taken as an indication of the severe arthritis that he developed in his hands and knees toward the end of his life, a biographical detail that Dārā points out in *Sakīnat al-awliyā'*.<sup>332</sup>

Along with the Walters Museum drawing, this painting is the first instance where a sufi guide and his disciple are shown in the act of *dīdār*. Through this intimate mutual viewing in which Mullā Shāh and Miyān Mīr are engrossed, the disciple receives the *feḏ*, or grace, from the master. This is the visual language that became popular for depicting sufis in an icon-like manner beginning in the 1640s. For example, court artist Chitarman repeats this theme in a later, simplified composition from the third quarter of the seventeenth century (**Fig. 4.20**). In this otherworldly, supra-temporal scene, Dārā Shikoh has arrived at Miyān Mīr's abode and is humbly seated with joined hands in a gesture of receiving grace and blessings from the great sufi *shaykh*. Mullā Shāh himself is seated next to Miyān Mīr, and acts as the ontological bridge between the *shaykh* and the young

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331 Yedda Godard. "Un Album de portraits des Princes timurides de l'Inde." *Ath-é Irān: Annales Du Service Archéologique De L'īrān*, Haarlem: J. Enschedé, no. 2, (1937): 201-204.

332 Dārā Shikoh, *Sakīnat al-awliyā'*, 47.

prince. As the elegantly calligraphed couplet bordering the painting suggests, the *dīdār* takes place at dawn in an enclosed garden complex. Most of the usual Indo-Muslim devotional signifiers are present, including the raised platform and shade-giving tree. The figure of Miyān Mīr is framed in the center of the open doorway leading into his dark, empty hut. If we carefully read the accompanying verse we realize that the entire composition, including the natural surroundings, is a representation of the inner state of the initiate in the process of receiving divine illumination. The verse reads:

I received, full of wonderment, the *feḏ* (grace) at dawning/the magical place,  
I found the Beloved of the Spirit (God) from the awakened heart!

The Chitarman painting also echoes a peculiar vision that Dārā Shikoh describes at great length in *Sakīnat al-awliyā*. The vision came to Dārā on the night of the 27<sup>th</sup> of Ramaḏān, 1050 AH (10<sup>th</sup> of January 1641), the *laylat al-qadr*, or Night of Power, which in Muslim tradition commemorates the night on which the entire Qur’ān was miraculously revealed to the Prophet. As one of the most auspicious annual events in the Islamic calendar, it is a night on which Muslims often make special prayer vigils. The prince explains that while seated in prayer, facing the *Ka’ba*, he was transported to a place where he saw a tall, beautiful building surrounded by a garden. He intuited that it was Miyān Mīr’s mausoleum, and inside the building was his tomb. Suddenly, he saw Miyān Mīr emerge from his tomb in fine apparel, seating himself in the courtyard. His eyes fell on Dārā and beckoned him to come close. By Dārā’s own account, the intimate exchange that followed was a kind of initiation in which the deceased saint transmitted esoteric knowledge to him directly.<sup>333</sup>

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333 See, Supriya Gandhi, “Mughal Self-Fashioning, Indic Self-Realization,” 62-63.

There are several other instances in both Dārā Shikoh and Jahānārā Begum's memoirs in which they encounter eminent sufi masters from different times and locations. Artworks such as La'lchand's initiation scene and the Chitarman painting almost certainly evoked multiple levels of meaning. In addition to acting as a practitioner's visual support during the common sufi practice of cultivating the memory and image of the guides in the heart—as Dārā Shikoh explains in the *Risāla-i haqqnumā*—the paintings also recall actual visions that disciples had of their guides. Supra-temporal, ahistorical meetings between saints and disciples are among the most familiar types of episode scattered across every sufi hagiography, biography and memoir. In this milieu time and history are not imagined as being solely linear. They do not always progress temporally from point A to point B. In contrast to the prevailing modern Western conception of time and space, Islamic thought conceives of time as a multivalent reality. It is a progression that is constantly being pierced by supra-temporal interventions. Immortal personages such as Muḥammad, Khizr and other great prophets and saints from “bygone” eras continue to interact with people of different periods, collapsing all sense of linear time and material space. It is easier to envision Islamic time as spherical, where any given moment has the potential to become a center, or stage, for the witnessing of the eternal. This conception is best summed up in a popular sufi couplet, sung regularly in *qawwālī* music, attributed to the medieval Central Asian saint Aḥmad-i-Jām:

The ones who are slain on the dagger of submission,  
Every moment receive a new life from the Unseen<sup>334</sup>

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334 Jahānārā, *Mū'nis al-arvāh*, 30. A *qawwālī* performance of this verse given before the Emperor Jahāngīr is mentioned in the *Jahangirnāma*.

Consideration of the Islamic view of time and space begs a further question: where exactly do extraterrestrial meetings between sufis from different epochs take place? In the *Risāla-i ḥaqqnumā* Dārā Shikoh elaborates on the creational hierarchy that every spiritual traveler must traverse in order to reach God.<sup>335</sup> The first step is to rise above the material realm by meditating on the face of the guide. This transports the traveler into the World of Imaginal/Ideal Forms (‘*ālam-i khayāl/‘ālam-i mithāl*), the realm where the archetype of each created thing in our world exists in its true form. In the realms above the material plane time is stretched out. As the Qur’ān says, “a day with God is as a thousand years of what you reckon.”<sup>336</sup> After practicing other meditative exercises the sufi may reach the station directly above the Imaginal World, known as the World of Symbolic/Angelic Forms (‘*ālam-i malakūt*). It is here, Dārā explains, that the traveler may encounter beatific visions of great saints, angelic beings and finally the face of the Prophet Muḥammad himself:

...Hence when you have toiled and labored on the aforementioned practices the rust on your heart will be removed, and the mirror of your heart will be illumined. And the images of the prophets, the friends of God and the angels will reflect therein. The image of your guide will reveal to you the image of the Prophet, his great companions and the exalted friends of God.<sup>337</sup>

The initiation of the two royal siblings—who had some of the best artists in the Muslim world working for them—gave visual expression to the regularly experienced and oft-reported religious phenomenon of visions. Foundational artworks such as La’lchand’s initiation painting became a prototype for visions of spiritual gatherings

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<sup>335</sup> See Chapter 2, footnote 33.

<sup>336</sup> Qur’ān, 22:47.

<sup>337</sup> Dārā Shikoh, *Ḥaqqnumā*, 4-5.

perpetually taking place in the eternal World of Symbolic Forms. In fact, beginning with the siblings' patronage, the most widespread sub-genre within the larger canopy of South Asian devotional painting is precisely imagery of otherworldly sufi gatherings. Although a detailed discussion of this sub-genre would lead me astray from the main theme of the chapter, it is important to compare the initiation painting with two of the earliest known “*majlis* paintings,” in order to underline the importance of the former.

In a painting from around 1645 made for the *Late Shāh Jahān Album*, six sages are shown seated in a courtyard next to a flowing river (**Fig. 4.21**).<sup>338</sup> Their arrangement is similar to the compositions already seen in the Walters Museum drawing and in the initiation painting. The figure on the top right seated under the shade of a large tree is easily recognizable as Shaykh Ḥusayn Chishtī, the same early-seventeenth-century *shaykh* being preferred by Jahāngīr over worldly kings in the famous painting by Bichitr (**Fig. 3.45**). Unlike the other *Late Shāh Jahān Album* folio discussed at the very beginning of this chapter (**Fig. 4.1**), which shows Mullā Shāh giving a sermon to his disciples, this page—from the San Diego Museum of Art—represents an otherworldly gathering, or *majlis*. Shaykh Ḥusayn, counting beads with both hands, sits facing Khwāja Quṭb al-Dīn Bakhtiyār Kākī (d.1235), the successor to the founding father of the Chishtī order, Mu’īn al-Dīn Chishtī. Bakhtiyār Kākī was also regarded as the first sufi to popularize the Chishtī order in the Sultanate capital of Delhi. In this painting, ascribed to Bichitr, he is shown gesturing with his right hand, addressing Shaykh Ḥusayn, while holding a book with his left hand. He can be identified as Kākī because another painting from the late Shāh Jahān period, housed in St. Petersburg (**Fig. 4.22**), shows the same

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338 For a discussion of this painting see, Okada, *Indian Miniatures of the Mughal Court*, 170, fig. 207.

figure in another spiritual gathering.<sup>339</sup> Since all of the figures in the St. Petersburg painting are labeled, it becomes clear in the San Diego Museum painting that two leaders of the Chishtī order from different eras are being shown leading the sufi gathering at sunset.

Both the San Diego and the St. Petersburg *majlis* paintings share distinct compositional traits with Dārā Shikoh's initiation painting. The figures are seated in a circle, reminiscent of a sufi *majlis*. The two senior figures are placed at the top of the group and directly in the center of the overall composition. They are both engrossed in the act of *dīdār*. In the San Diego painting Shaykh Ḥusayn is receiving teachings and blessings from his predecessor, while in the St. Petersburg example Mu'īn al-Dīn, founder of the Chishtīyya, is being blessed by the twelfth-century founding father of the Qādirī order, Shaykh Muḥyī al-Dīn 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī.

Both paintings also reintroduce the presence of clearly defined horizontal registers, a uniquely Indic compositional format first used in medieval-period illustrations. Starting around the tenth century, before the introduction of paper, the earliest examples of Indian illustrations were made on unbound horizontal strips of palm leaf. Even after the introduction of paper around the twelfth century, this convention continued, as seen in illustrations of Jain and Buddhist sacred literature in which the format remained horizontal. With the introduction of the Islamic codex—the bound vertical manuscript—local artists modified their compositions to fit their imagery into a newly emerging format. This adaptation consisted of stacking horizontal registers on top of each other to fill the vertical design of the page. Composing an image through

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339 This painting is from the St. Petersburg *Muraqqa'*. See, O. F. Akimushkin, *The St. Petersburg Muraqqa': Album of Indian and Persian Miniatures of the 16th-18th Centuries and Specimens of Persian Calligraphy of 'Imād Al-Ḥasanī* (Lugano: Arch Foundation, 1996), 74-75, and Plate 71 in volume 2.



horizontal registers is a key Indic visual element that persisted throughout the development of pre-colonial painting, even after the introduction of Persianate and European pictorial conventions. In the pre-Mughal era the stacking of registers to compose a vertical space is best represented by illustrations from the *Chandāyan* (**Fig. 3.2**).

In all three of the *majlis* paintings that have been discussed the composition is divided into three horizontal registers that reflect a symbolic hierarchy. The most important personages occupy the central space. Figures of secondary significance are relegated to the bottom register, while in all three examples the background dominates the top register. The St. Petersburg *majlis* painting exhibits the most idiosyncratic background, which appears to have been added from a Renaissance print in the eighteenth century, when the Shāh Jahān period album was taken to Isfahan. Importantly, in all three paintings the hierarchical division of the page culminates in the sky, hinting perhaps at the heavenly abode of the Unseen. In the case of the St. Petersburg painting, it is clear that its dour background landscape, with its European seaport and looming dark skies, has been repurposed to function as part of the painting's symbolic program. While this particular background veers toward naturalistic representation, the sacred precinct occupied by the sufis in all three paintings is consciously flattened, most visibly in the initiation painting. The carpet and the reed mat on which the figures sit are seen from a bird's eye view. I would argue that the flattening and abstraction of the space transposes the scene into an otherworldly reality that is no longer bound to the illusionistic rules of naturalism. The portraits, however, are characterized by a hyper-reality, perhaps keeping in mind the ritualistic function of remembering and meditating on the faces of the saints.

The artists responsible for these paintings clearly possessed multiple representational tools: they show their mastery over naturalism when required but also thoughtfully avoid it when representing a sanctified space.

The St. Petersburg Album *majlis* painting, which uses earlier portraits of both Quṭb al-Dīn Bakhtiyār Kākī and Mu'īn al-Dīn Chishtī, represents the coming together of the two most popular sufi *ṭuruq* of South Asia, the Qādiriyya and the Chishtīyya. The twelfth-century founding father of the Qādirī order, Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, is seated facing Mu'īn al-Dīn Chishtī. The figure of al-Jīlānī is clearly based on Shaykh Ḥusayn from the San Diego painting (**Figs. 4.21** and **4.22**). Both are shown sitting on their haunches, wearing stark white *jāmas* and brown woolen shawls, counting beads with both hands. Bakhtiyār Kākī is seated directly below his guide, Mu'īn al-Dīn. In hundreds of subsequent paintings showing the exact same composition, Kākī can always be recognized by his profile portrait, full black beard and the shawl draped around him like a cape (**Fig. 4.23**). Similarly, the portrait of 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī was used as a model for many individual portraits in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (**Fig. 4.24**). In the forthcoming discussion of Jahānārā I will discuss the popularity of the *majlis* paintings in connection with her possible patronage, as is evidenced through her writing.

In addition to providing a model for later *majlis* compositions the Dārā initiation painting also became the prototype for portraits of both Miyān Mīr and Mullā Shāh. There are several later artworks based on the La'lchand painting that depict the master and disciple viewing each other alone (**Fig. 4.25**).<sup>340</sup>

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340 Another folio from the St. Petersburg *Muraqqa'* is in fact based closely on the La'lchand initiation painting. Mullā Shāh is now seated below Khwāja Bihārī on the right. Dārā is absent altogether. An unidentified sufi is shown sitting opposite the nimbused Miyān Mīr, conversing with him. See Appendix I, fig. 8. For a discussion of the folio see, Akimushkin, *The St. Petersburg Muraqqa'*, 75, Plate 74.

The initiation painting also marks a major shift in the role of the patron/sufi Dārā Shikoh (**Fig. 4.17**). As a younger teenage patron the prince was portrayed as the center of God-manifestation for the sufi. Later the roles are reversed. It is the prince who is gaining *fez* from the *dīdār* of the saints, in particular, the two authorities he considered as his primary guides. A large border frames the painting, with golden illuminations against a speckled, white ground. It is punctuated by seven cartouches with two unrelated Persian quatrains. It is unclear whether the seemingly unrelated quatrains were paired with the painting as part of the overall compositional program, or added later when the artwork was included in an album. It is also unclear if the rather abstruse verses—one of which can definitely be attributed to Ḥāfiẓ—correlate with the painting. The top quatrain, as yet unidentified, reads:

In your street tear-pearls rain down from the eyes,  
And from every eyelash spills forth the blood of passion

When the dove carries my message over there,  
It is a goblet [of wine] that Gabriel pours over his wings

This highly conventional poem uses the image of the street where the beloved resides. In love poetry it is understood to be the street where a thousand impassioned lovers give their lives, thirsting for a single glimpse from the beloved. Are we to assume that a medieval, courtly poem in which the line between worldly and otherworldly love is completely blurred, is being reused for an expressly sacred purpose? Is the “street” where the angelic dove carries the message “over there” referring to the World of Symbolic Forms, the actual realm of angels and saints?

The equally opaque verse in the lower half of the border contains the first three lines from Ḥāfīz's quatrain number 39. The complete poem reads:

With a sassy beauty and with a lute and a flute,  
A quiet corner, leisure and a bottle of wine

Since our veins have become hot with wine,  
Not a single grain do we require from Ḥāṭīm Tayy (the exemplar of generosity)<sup>341</sup>

In Persian sufi poetry wine is always used as a metaphor for God-knowledge. The “beauty” usually represents either the guide figure or, as is seen in the *Dārā Shikoh Album*, the locus for God's manifestation. In this context, is the quatrain reimagined as narrating the “quiet corner” of the *majlis*, in the company of the beloved, where the wine of God-knowledge runs through all the participants' veins?

### III. Jahānārā Begum: Practitioner and Patron

As formally initiated sufi practitioners Jahānārā Begum and Dārā Shikoh were unique figures in Mughal history. When considered in relation to the artworks they commissioned, their writings grant us singular insight into the modalities of the invocatory path of Sufism as practiced within an early modern North Indian milieu. Their personal accounts are all the more intriguing given their striking prominence in court life. Dārā Shikoh significantly outranked his three younger brothers in status, income and land holding.<sup>342</sup> Similarly, Jahānārā, who became the first lady of the empire after her mother

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341 Ḥāfīz, quatrain 39. <https://ganjoor.net/hafez/robaee2/sh39/>

342 As Munis Faruqi explains, “evidence of Dārā Shukoh's favored status is manifold. An example is his imperial rank. By 1657, the last full year of Shah Jahan's reign, Dārā Shukoh had been elevated to the extraordinary standing of 50000/40000 (rank/horsemen)... Compare this to the combined rank of 55000/42000 for Shuja', Aurangzeb, and Murad. Unlike his three younger brothers... Dārā Shukoh was more-or-less permanently based at the court, giving him a powerful voice in the day-to-day administration

Mumtaz Maḥal's death, had the "privilege and prestige of issuing royal edicts...at the tender age of seventeen."<sup>343</sup> She was also given the royal seal enabling her to carry out important political and commercial transactions, and "was granted the territory of Surat and the revenues collected from the highly trafficked international port."<sup>344</sup> She owned her own fleet, and in addition to trading with powerful European companies, would send family members and ladies of the harem to Mecca for Hajj. She was also no stranger to the complexity of imperial politics. Jahānārā maintained her loyalty to Shāh Jahān throughout the turbulent years of the war of succession, staunchly supporting Dārā Shikoh's bid for kingship. In 1657, after Shāh Jahān had taken ill and the war between his four sons was in full swing, Jahānārā attempted to broker a truce, acting as an interlocutor between her brothers and the emperor.<sup>345</sup> In short, during the mid-seventeenth century there was arguably no other woman in the imperial world who wielded more wealth, power and influence than Jahānārā. Furthermore, her own writings are proof of her being a widely read and learned woman of the court.

It is no coincidence that Jahānārā's rise to political prominence aligned with the flowering of her ambitions as a patron, which included the new developments in the genre of sufi portraiture. Immediately after her initiation she and her brother used their ample resources to patronize several large architectural projects in collaboration with

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of the empire." Munis Faruqi, *The Princes of the Mughal Empire, 1504-1719* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 38-39.

343 Afshan Bokhari, "Imperial Transgressions and Spiritual Investitures: A Begam's 'Ascension' in Seventeenth Century Mughal India," *Journal of Persianate Studies* 4 (2011), 95-96.

344 Bokhari, "Imperial Transgressions and Spiritual Investitures," 95-96.

345 "When Aurangzeb and Murad together prevailed over the imperial forces in the battles of Dharmat (April 1658) and Samugarh (May 1658), their sister Jahan Ara offered another proposal. Working on behalf of Shah Jahan, she broached the possibility of dividing the empire five ways". Munis Faruqi. *The Princes of the Mughal Empire, 1504-1719*, 40.

Mullā Shāh, both in Kashmir and in Lahore. According to architectural historian Ebba Koch, “Jahanara and the emperor’s favorite son, Dara Shikoh, started a small architectural workshop at Kashmir under the guidance of their spiritual teacher, the Sufi mystic Mulla Shah Badakhshi.”<sup>346</sup> Jahānārā personally funded the large mosque and *khānqāh* complex for her guide in Srinagar. She and Mullā Shāh are also associated with a hanging garden called *Peri Mahal* (Fairies’ Garden) in Kashmir. “It appears to belong to those ‘lofty buildings, spirit-increasing dwellings and heart-attracting recreation places,’ which the saint designed and constructed with the support of the prince and his sister Jahanara.”<sup>347</sup> In his *Mathnaviyyāt* collection Mullā Shāh includes a eulogy titled, “In Praise of the Garden of Jahānārā.”<sup>348</sup> In the first quatrain he succinctly praises the garden and its patron simultaneously:

The boat of my eulogy  
Has docked before Jahānārā  
If I grasp [the description of] her/its qualities  
I would spend every breath of every moment with that thought

Dārā Shikoh also constructed his own gardens around Mullā Shāh’s winter residence on the outskirts of Lahore and adjacent to Miyān Mīr’s mausoleum. The tomb of Mullā Shāh is located in the center of these gardens (**Fig. 4.26**). While historians Koch and Bokhari have highlighted Jahānārā’s role in patronizing major building projects, there has been no attempt to identify the same relationship in the parallel realms of literature and painting.

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<sup>346</sup> Ebba Koch, *Mughal Architecture: An Outline of Its History and Development, 1526-1858* (Munich: Prestel, 1991), 96.

<sup>347</sup> Ebba Koch, *Mughal Architecture*, 117.

<sup>348</sup> Mulla Shah, *Mathnawiyyāt*, folio 54a.

This study aims to remedy this oversight. By examining Jahānārā's own writings, most notably her intimate autobiography, the *Risāla-i ṣaḥibiyya*, I will highlight the central role she played in catalyzing a new possibility within the landscape of Indo-Muslim devotional painting. It is my contention that her contributions as a patron were informed by her unique circumstances as both a sufi practitioner and as a noblewoman observing the norms of her culture and station.

In the preceding section I discussed some of the first artworks that were made expressly for a devotional function. All of the compositions included sufi gatherings in which the act of *dīdār* frames our understanding of the scenes. From these early representations of Miyān Mīr's Qādirī order the iconography and style for representing individual portraits of saints for the express purpose of devotional viewing was established. In the following section I will highlight key individual portraits of Mullā Shāh and examine their function as elaborated by Jahānārā Begum in the *Risāla-i ṣaḥibiyya*. Completed on the cusp of 1642, the *Ṣaḥibiyya* is an account of the princess's quest for a spiritual master. She begins the treatise with a long biography of Mullā Shāh, which includes his daily spiritual exercises, his habits, miracles and a description of his close disciples. In the second section she focuses on her own quest.

Recent studies of Jahānārā's writings imply that her privileged position as a favored princess would have given her unprecedented access to the sufi milieu. It is also assumed that she intended to use association with spiritual authorities as a tool to further consolidate and expand her political influence, in the tradition of her Mughal forbears.<sup>349</sup>

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349 For a typical example see, Afshan Bokhari, "The 'Light' of the Timuria." Culturally elite women were protected from the public eye not only by physically shielding them, but also, as Supriya Gandhi points out, in the literature. "Jahanara's relative absence from the pages of her brother's sufi writings can thus be explained by the prevailing social norms of the later Mughal empire according to which the activities of

However, by her own account, establishing contact with sufi masters was by no means an easy undertaking. According to Jahānārā, from the age of twenty onward it had been her wish to be initiated into the Chishtīyya, the sufi order that had firmly established Islamic mysticism in India in the thirteenth century. Jahānārā's desire to be attached to this revered order was so great that a few years prior to writing the *Risāla-i ṣāhibiyya* she made a pilgrimage to the shrine of Mu'in al-Dīn Chishtī in Ajmer, where she was probably accepted into the order nominally without being granted guidance by a living authority. Despite her various attempts to make contact with Chishtī guides, it appears that she was denied formal initiation. Persistent in her devotion, she maintained a close association with the Chishtīs even after her initiation into the Qādirī order, and wrote a hagiography titled *Mu'nis al-arvāh*, detailing the lives of the great Chishtī saints. This volume is evidence of her immersion in the *tazkira* literature introduced to her by Dārā Shikoh.

In 1639/40 Jahānārā traveled with her father and brother from Delhi to Lahore, bidding them farewell as they departed for a military campaign in Kabul. In Lahore she continued her search for spiritual masters, but every saint that she visited turned her away, refusing her request for initiation on the grounds that it was the tradition of the sufis to avoid excessive association with royalty. It is clear from the example of Mullā Shāh that sufis were wary of getting entangled in court politics.<sup>350</sup> This was not the only

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royal women seldom entered official writings. Mention of such women is generally cloaked in titles and epithets that laud their chastity and piety." Supriya Gandhi, "Mughal Self-Fashioning, Indic Self-Realization" (PhD dissertation, Harvard University, 2011), 54.

350 According to Mullā Shāh's biographer Tavakkul Beg Kūlabī, the saint initially rejected, rather forcefully, all requests made by Dārā Shikoh to become his disciple. See, Kūlabī, *Nuskha-i ahvāl-i shāhi*, British Library, MS OR 3203, fol. 38 b. For a discussion of why the prince edited out this event from his own account of his interaction with Mullā Shāh see, Supriya Gandhi, "Mughal Self-Fashioning, Indic Self-Realization" (PhD dissertation, Harvard University, 2011), 52.



obstacle Jahānārā faced: traditionally, within the elite Indo-Muslim cultural milieu it was not customary for a noblewoman observing *pardah* to visit and converse with a man outside of the family fold, even if he were a recognized saint. The fact is that Jahānārā's royal seclusion prevented her from experiencing direct, personal contact with any of the saints whom she asked for initiation. The following passage from the *Ṣaḥībiyya* alludes to her predicament:

Since Lahore had several revered *shaykhs*, I started searching for a *murshid* (guide) who would directly guide me on the path of Union... I was particularly in search for a guide belonging to the Chishtī order, and whenever I would hear of some master or recluse I would immediately send my servant with offerings to inquire about them, seeking instructions about spiritual methods. Some of these great men would instruct me in certain invocatory methods. But none made me happy, and I couldn't benefit from them."<sup>351</sup>

Her terse final comment is most likely an elliptical acknowledgment of the difficulties she faced in making contact with qualified sufi guides. Among the many spiritual masters who refused Jahānārā were Shāh Dawla of Gujarat and Khwāja Bihārī of Lahore. Artists in North India regularly depicted Shāh Dawla in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, most notably in an exquisite standing portrait from the *Late Shāh Jahān Album*, in which he is shown facing Shāh Dilrubā who is represented in the facing folio (**Fig. 1.3**).<sup>352</sup>

Eventually, through Dārā Shikoh's intercession and a courtship-like correspondence in which the princess wooed the saint, Jahānārā was able to gain access to Mullā Shāh. After months of exchanging letters and gifts with Jahānārā, the Mullā, at the official invitation of the Emperor of India, visited the princess's quarters in Kashmir,

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<sup>351</sup> Jahānārā Begum, *Risāla-i ṣaḥībiyya*, 98-99

<sup>352</sup> Wright and Stronge, *Muraqqa'*, 397-398, figure 66A.

and in the company of Dārā Shikoh, initiated her into the Qādirī order (for a complete translation of the passage describing her initiation see Appendix II).<sup>353</sup> Earlier in her autobiography Jahānārā makes it a point to highlight the fact that, “From the family of Amīr Timūr, Lord of Heavenly Conjunction, it is only us two, brother and sister, who are pursuing the path of Truth, and are attached to our guide. None of our predecessors has been blessed with this joy, and none took the step on the path of God-seeking and Truth-searching. For this (good fortune), I am eternally grateful, and there is no end to my joy.”<sup>354</sup>

During the initiation ritual Jahānārā says—once again, very elliptically—that she “held on to her master” of her own volition, suggesting the traditional sufi initiation in which the master takes the hand of the novice into his own while admitting her into the esoteric order. After the official initiation, through the intercession of Dārā Shikoh, she was given the method and practice of the Qādirī order. Jahānārā’s fascinating account of her contact with Mullā Shāh and subsequent initiation sheds light on an aspect of spiritual practice that is directly linked with images of saints. It is here that she explains the use of saints’ portraits as objects of devotion, referring to paintings made by artists working in the royal Mughal atelier. The following passage establishes, without doubt, the function of these paintings, and needs to be read in full to understand the context:

Even before I could witness the perfection of my revered guide with my own eyes, my brother had given me Ḥaẓrat’s [Mullā Shāh’s] blessed *shabīh* (portrait), painted on paper by his [Dārā Shikoh’s] *muṣavvīr* (painter). And I would gaze at his revered portrait all the time with a pure

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353 Jahānārā Begum, *Risāla-i šāhibiyya*, 101-103.

354 Jahānārā Begum, *Risāla-i šāhibiyya*, 103-104. For an alternate English translation of this passage see, Afshan Bokhari, “The ‘Light’ of the Timuria: Jahan Ara Begum’s Patronage, Piety, and Poetry in 17th-century Mughal India,” *Marg* vol. 60, no. 1 (2008), 54.

and faithful viewing. And during certain prescribed times I would contemplate on the image of Ḥaẓrat's blessed face. And on the first day [of my initiation], my learned brother according to the method of Our Guide which is the way of the noble Qādirī order, engaged me in the technique of *tavajjuh* (concentrating) on the face of the Guide and *taṣavvur* (visualizing) of the faces of the Prophet and the four honorable friends [the first four caliphs] and the other *awliyā' Allah* (friends of God).<sup>355</sup> The next day I made my ablution, put on purified clothes and kept a fast. At dinnertime I broke my fast with quinces sent to me by Our Guide... Then I sat until midnight in the mosque that I have in my quarters. After performing *tahajjud* (the pre-dawn prayers) I came to my room and sat in a corner, facing the *qibla* (the niche facing the direction of the *Ka'ba*), and concentrated my mind on the picture of the master, whilst at the same time visualizing the company of our holy Prophet, his companions and the friends of God, may God be pleased with them all.

This thought crossed my mind: since I am a follower of the Chishtīyya order and now am come to the Qādirīyya, will I receive any spiritual openings or not?<sup>356</sup> And will I benefit from the guidance and instruction of Ḥaẓrat-i Shāhī (Mullā Shāh)? While lost in this thought I entered a state in which I was neither asleep nor awake. I saw the Holy Prophet seated with his companions and the great saints in a sacred gathering. Ḥaẓrat-i Akhund (another title for Mullā Shāh) who was also present sitting close to the Prophet, had placed his head on his Grace's blessed feet. And the Prophet, Peace be upon him, spoke, saying, "O Mullā Shāh! You have lit the Timurid lamp."<sup>357</sup> At that moment I returned from that state, joyous and ecstatic, and thanked the Lord with many prostrations.<sup>358</sup>

This strikingly candid passage touches upon many fascinating themes, offering us a rare window into early modern Muslim India as seen through a woman's perspective. It not only reveals gender dynamics within a rigidly segregated Muslim elite, but also sheds light on the doctrines and methods of Islamic spirituality. While a thorough socio-religious discussion is beyond the scope of this study, it is an extremely worthy subject

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355 As discussed in Chapter Two, here we have a clear distinction between meditating on an image of the guide and visualizing the faces of the Friends.

356 This suggests that she was informally part of the Chishtīyya order to gain blessings without having initiation, as many people in the subcontinent are to this day.

357 "Timurid" refers to the royal lineage of the house of Emperor Timūr, which was carried forward by the Mughal rulers in India

358 Jahānārā Begum, *Risāla-i ṣāhibiyya*, 101-103

for future research. Of chief significance for this survey is Jahānārā's description of sufi portraits being used as objects for contemplation and tools for spiritual visualization.

The princess explicitly mentions her use of Mullā Shāh's portraits even before she was officially initiated into *taṣawwuf*. She used his image for the express purpose of contemplation during prescribed times when aspirants are given sacred formulae to recite daily as preparation for their initiation. This perfectly aligns with Dārā Shikoh's description regarding the practices of an aspirant, as detailed in the *Risāla-i ḥaqqnumā*. He explains that a spiritual seeker should first and foremost sit in an isolated corner and visualize the image of his or her spiritual master.<sup>359</sup> While it would have been normal for an aspirant such as Dārā to have regular face-to-face meetings with his guides, for a lady of the imperial harem observing strict *pardah* such encounters would have been next to impossible. This is exactly what is implied in Jahānārā's autobiography. Any saint or prospective guide whom she wanted to have contact with would respond either through letters or go-betweens. It was only on her initiation day that she first set eyes upon Mullā Shāh.

It is important to note that according to historical and hagiographical accounts women did indeed participate in the practices of Sufism.<sup>360</sup> Miyān Mīr and Mullā Shāh are both known to have initiated their sisters into the Qādirī order, and there are many accounts of saints guiding and conversing with female disciples, often interacting with them in person. But these women were not part of the royal elite, and thus were exempt from the rigid segregation of *pardah* observance. To this day in most sufi shrines men

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359 Dārā Shikoh, *Ḥaqqnumā*, 4.

360 Every major hagiography of sufi orders always has a chapter focusing on the great women sufis in Islam, including Dārā Shikoh's *Safīnat al-awliyā'*.

and women circulate in the same shared space. Jahānārā's case was, however, quite unique. Having never seen Mullā Shāh in real life it would have been impossible for her to “visualize the image” of her guide during the prescribed periods of daily spiritual exercises. The paintings and drawings of individual portraits of her guide thus acted as a stand-in for his physical presence. The artworks functioned as aids to Jahānārā's practice of visualizing the saint “with the eye of the heart.”<sup>361</sup>

A small drawing of Mullā Shāh—with a later inscription misidentifying him as Rūmī—from the collection of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts could well have served the purpose of contemplative viewing during the months that Jahānārā was an aspirant, prior to joining the Qādirī order (**Fig. 4.27**). The simple drawing, made on untreated blank *vasli* paper, shows the Mullā seated on a reed mat with his knees drawn up close to him and his arms wrapped around his legs. He is shown in profile, in his customary large white turban, facing to the left. He is wearing a stark, blood red *jāma* with olive green cord and tassels. A black meditation stick used to prop his arms during long vigils lies stiffly on one side, while a black leather-bound volume rests in front of him. The two objects declare his two main vocations: saintly contemplative and author of mystical prose. As in the Walters Museum drawing, Mullā Shāh has younger features, with greying beard and black mustache and eyebrows. His physique is also less portly than it tends to appear in later paintings. Unlike the Walters Museum drawing of six sages, which is rendered with deliberate strokes and a bold outline, the Boston drawing has a very light outline made in a hurried hand. A few quick strokes, for instance, with very

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361 Dārā Shikoh, *Ḥaqqnumā*, 4.

little rendering, give form to his beard, turban and eyes (**Fig. 4.28**). Given that Jahānārā's initiation happened in late 1640, the drawing can tentatively be dated to circa 1639-1640.

Along with other drawings of Mullā Shāh from the same period, the Boston drawing was probably presented to Jahānārā as a single, loose folio that could be propped up on a stand. This particular use of a single folio portrait is depicted in an early-eighteenth-century painting (**Fig. 4.29**). It shows a nobleman sitting in a courtyard next to a lake viewing the portrait (*shabīh*) of his beloved. Almost ritualistically, he has prepared two betel leaves (*pān*), one for himself, which he holds in his left hand, and the other for his absent beloved, to whose image he presents the *pān*. The composition implies that through the image the woman is made present, the portrait becoming an agent of interaction between the lover and his beloved. The existence of a painting depicting this particular use of the *shabīh* strongly suggests that it became an established function of portraits.

In a similar vein, in the *Risāla-i šāhibiyya* Jahānārā mentions the use of Mullā Shāh's *shabīh* as a portal, or medium, for direct communication with him. Following the detailed account of her initiation, Jahānārā explains how one evening, a few days prior to her departure from Kashmir, she sat before an image of Mullā Shāh and began meditating on his presence. In that state she asked him, through the medium of the image, to give her the *chādar* that he habitually wore over his shoulders. The next morning, while she was in the process of writing this request in the form of a letter, her eunuch came carrying the very shawl she had desired. According to the eunuch, Mullā Shāh had been inspired the

evening before to give it to Jahānārā.<sup>362</sup> It is clear from this anecdote that the princess regarded portraits of Mullā Shāh as surrogates for the physical presence of the saint.

There are known portraits from around the 1640s that show Mullā Shāh standing with a shawl draped over one shoulder. One drawing in particular could well have been the one mentioned by Jahānārā in the preceding anecdote (**Fig. 4.30**).<sup>363</sup> Similar in format to the Boston drawing, the figure is shown standing against the bare *vasli* paper. Mullā Shāh is wearing a white *jāma* loosely tied with an opaque white sash. His hands are folded behind his back and he has a white *chādar* draped over his left shoulder. His face is painted far more meticulously compared to the earlier drawing. Each hair of his greying beard is carefully rendered, as are the eyebrows above his keen, sparkling eyes. Even the hairs sticking out of his ear have been included in this tiny portrait (**Fig. 4.31**). The drawing appears to have been damaged at some point by water, and it has gathered mould around the legs and shoes. There is damage visible on his forehead as well. The *vasli* appears not to have been intended for a manuscript, as it shows no sign of margins or borders along the edges. Following Jahānārā's descriptions, it is easy to imagine the loose leaf propped on a wall niche in the princess's prayer room, where she would spend her time in nightly vigils. Given the proposed function of the artwork during her early years as an initiate it is possible to date it to around 1640-41.

Jahānārā's patronage was also intimately linked to the genesis of the unique sub-genre of sufi devotional images that I have dubbed the "*majlis* paintings." As discussed earlier in the chapter, one of the most popular and widespread themes within South Asian devotional painting in the early modern period is the depiction of sufi gatherings in which

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362 Jahānārā Begum, *Risāla-i šāhibiyya*, 105-106.

363 See, Toby Falk and Mildred Archer, *Indian Miniatures in the India Office Library*, 85, fig. 86.

revered saints from the Qādirī and Chishtī orders are shown sitting together in a circle. Some of the earliest representations of this composition originated between circa 1640 and 1660, the decade when Jahānārā and Dārā Shikoh were active both as patrons and as sufi practitioners.

When the writings of the two siblings are compared it is evident that Jahānārā was more closely attached to the Chishtī order than her brother. She compiled biographies of the great Chishtī saints of India into the volume titled *Mū'nis al-arvāh* (*Confidante of the Souls*, completed in 1640). In its epilogue, added in 1643, she included a long personal account of her own visit to the shrine of Mu'īn al-Dīn Chishtī.<sup>364</sup> In the months of Sha'bān and Ramazān she accompanied her father to Ajmer where she stayed in a building next to the shrine. During the day she would spend her time sitting under the shade of trees and at night she would recite the Qur'ān in her quarters. She participated in the grand arrangements for the saint's birthday. On the night of the full moon, during which Jahānārā kept a fast, she was given permission to enter the sacred precinct of the shrine. By her own account, she crawled barefoot from the gateway of the entrance to the shrine itself, kissing the earth with every movement. Following a cycle similar to the circumambulation around the *Ka'ba*, she circled the cenotaph seven times.<sup>365</sup> She reports that the unique sensation of receiving blessings was beyond what she could ever express in words. As a sign of gratitude, she rubbed perfume on the cenotaph and on the pulpit of the mosque with her own hands. In the *Ṣāhibiyya* she calls herself “a follower of the

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364 Jahānārā Begum, *Mū'nis al-arvāh*, Bodleian Library, MS. Fraser 229, Fol. 80b-83a.

365 Equating a saint's shrine to the *Ka'ba* is a favorite topos in Muslim devotional literature. Dārā Shikoh also uses this theme in poems praising Miyān Mīr's Lahore and Mullā Shāh's Kashmir as the *Ka'bas* of the seeker. See, Supriya Gandhi, “Mughal Self-Fashioning, Indic Self-Realization” (PhD dissertation, Harvard University, 2011), 75-76.



Chishtīyya order.” Even today, it is very common for sufis to have affiliations with more than one spiritual order, often taking multiple initiations to receive the blessings of as many *ṭuruq* as possible. If Jahānārā’s affiliation with the Chishtīyya was indeed nominal, her detailed description of the visit to Ajmer makes it clear that her devotion was sincere.<sup>366</sup>

Recalling the *Ṣāhibiyya*, when Jahānārā describes the night vigil that followed her initiation, she mentions her affiliation with both orders: “This thought crossed my mind, that since I am a follower of the Chishtīyya order and now am come to the Qādiriyya, will I receive any spiritual openings or not? And will I benefit from the guidance and instruction of Ḥaẓrat-i Shāhī (Mullā Shāh) or not?” It was in precisely this moment that, according to her, she entered into a spiritual state where she witnessed a gathering of the great saints with the Prophet himself as their leader:

“While I was lost in this thought I entered a state in which I was neither asleep nor awake. I saw that the Holy Prophet was seated with his companions and the great saints in a sacred gathering. Ḥaẓrat-i Akhund (another title for Mullā Shāh) who was also present sitting close to the Prophet, had placed his head on his Grace’s blessed feet. And the Prophet, Peace be upon him, spoke, saying, ‘O Mullā Shāh! You have lit the Timurid lamp.’ At that moment I returned from that state, joyous and ecstatic, and thanked the Lord with prostrations.”

Given Jahānārā’s personal visionary experiences and her continued contact with two of the greatest sufi orders in India, it is more than likely that the *majlis* paintings showing the founding fathers of the two *ṭuruq* pictured together were first made under her patronage. As I have already discussed previously in the chapter, **Figure 4.22** is the

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<sup>366</sup> Jahānārā is interred within the precinct of the Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā’ shrine in Delhi, one of the major centers for Chishti devotion in North India.

earliest known *majlis* painting that shows the heads of the Qādirī and Chishtī orders leading a sacred gathering. The folio—with the surreal Renaissance-style background added in the eighteenth century—shows Mu’īn al-Dīn Chishtī absorbed in the act of viewing ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, the medieval founder of the Qādirī order. Following the long tradition of Chishtī hagiographical literature—including the book written by ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq Muḥaddith-i Dehlavī—Jahānārā includes the legendary account of a young Mu’īn al-Dīn going to Iraq to visit Jīlānī, where he is said to have spent five months in the company of the Qādirī saint. Both the visual and the literary accounts establish the preeminence of the Qādirī order in Indian Sufism, a preeminence that was perpetuated by Jahānārā, first in her biography of saints and later in the paintings commissioned by her.

While scholars have written surprisingly little on Jahānārā in the fields of political history, religious studies and art history, her younger brother Dārā Shikoh has received a great deal of attention. However, the visual and literary evidence that I have presented in this chapter shows without doubt that the first lady of the Mughal Empire played a vital role in the formation and dispersal of the genre of saints’ portraiture. There are other intriguing sub-genres of devotional painting, such as the popular artworks depicting female devotees sitting in the wilderness, engaged in meditation (**Fig. C.15**), which could also be connected to her patronage. In order to better understand this rich and multifaceted topic—the impact of female patrons and subjects in seventeenth and eighteenth-century Mughal devotional painting—more nuanced research needs to be initiated. The present discussion of Jahānārā’s legacy as a patron and literary voice is a first step toward this larger goal.

#### IV. Mapping the Genre Through Portraits of Mullā Shāh

The development of the genre of saints' portraiture can be mapped through representations of Mullā Shāh himself (for a detailed list of known portraits of the saint refer to Appendix I). If we trace the dissemination of these portraits we can examine how the prototype established by artists working for Jahānārā Begum and Dārā Shikoh was copied and transmitted into other regional workshops throughout North India in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

In the preceding sections I have discussed key early images of Mullā Shāh, dating them to circa 1638-1642. In the paintings in which the saint appears in gatherings I have shown how artists mixed the formal conventions of flattened, abstracted space with minutely rendered, hyper-real portraiture in order to depict an otherworldly realm. Later portraits, particularly those made posthumously, move even further into an icon-like representational language, gradually rejecting the naturalism seen in the earlier figures. I will end this section with a discussion of a selection of these later portraits.

The first singular portraits of Mullā Shāh, such as **Figures 4.27** and **4.30**, were quick, informal studies in which the saint is placed against an unpainted surface or a simple background. By the late 1640s and early 1650s the visual language became formal, with more single-figure portraits of the Mullā produced for inclusion in imperial albums. One such painting (**Fig. 4.32**) is an excellent example of this shift, and reflects the growing importance of the saint in Shāh Jahān's court.<sup>367</sup> It shows Mullā Shāh in a resplendent yellow *jāma* with an olive green *chādar* tied around him to help secure his legs in his favorite posture of meditation. In the *Sakīnat al-awliyā*' Dārā Shikoh mentions

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367Abolala Soudavar, and Milo Cleveland Beach, *Art of the Persian Courts: Selections from the Art and History Trust Collection* (New York: Rizzoli, 1992), 318, fig. 129f.

how his spiritual preceptor would sit for hours, lost in deep meditation, in this very pose. The white embroidered *chāndinī* cloth spread out over the reed mat on which the Mullā is sitting is made in a flattened perspective, as if seen from above. A muslin scarf lies twisted to one side on the *chāndinī*, along with a black *tasbīḥ* (rosary), leather-bound books, a penholder and a meditation crutch. The crutch, with an ivory handle ending in two lion heads, is similar to another crutch depicted in the Boston drawing in that it is also shown flattened, rather than lying at a naturalistic angle on top of the carpet. The books and penholder on the other hand are shown in perspective. The outline of the figure of the saint is drawn in bold, stark strokes that separate him from his surroundings. The barely perceivable shadow that runs under him and along the large decorated bolster enhances the seeming weightlessness of the figure. Throughout the painting there is a subtle tension between highly rendered naturalism, as seen in his clothes and beard, and a more graphic sensibility. The background is a light wash of malachite green tinted with hues of yellow and purple suggesting a quiet evening sky. Overall, the ornate border, the bold outlines framing the figure and the conscious flattening of certain objects and spaces contribute to a formal, icon-like portrait of Mullā Shāh.<sup>368</sup>

The carefully staged objects also point to the saint's inner qualities and vocations. The prayer beads and meditation crutch draw attention to his contemplative calling. The books and penholder allude to his prolific literary works. In most paintings made during and after the 1650s Mullā Shāh is shown in pastel-colored apparel. In this particular painting the hem of his pale yellow robe cascades down from his knees to reveal a blood red inner lining. Is this a subtle symbolic allusion to his inner state? In Indic devotional

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<sup>368</sup> See the introduction for a discussion on the word "icon."

language the color red is a familiar topos representing the station of spiritual love and intoxication.

Even more so than the objects, it is the saint's face that should be understood as the locus of the painting's iconicity. Mullā Shāh is framed by a large golden halo with emanating rays. Although he is ostensibly elderly, with a completely white beard and mustache and wrinkled forehead, he has a clear, smooth face with healthy, round features, giving him an ageless appearance. His stern, unsmiling expression adds to the formal staging of the portrait. This detail is in contrast to other images of him, in which he is shown smiling, echoing the descriptions of his countenance given by Jahānārā and Dārā Shikoh. As Jahānārā explains:

...he was always cheerful, expansive and smiling. His way was not of dryness and constriction. Sometimes he would laugh joyously, and following the tradition of the Prophet, occasionally joke with his close disciples.<sup>369</sup>

The painting was made to fit into a late Shāh Jahān-period album by adding thin cartouche strips around the inner border that contain lines from a poem written by the famous medieval Persian poet and saint Sa'dī Shirāzī. The calligraphy appears to have been recycled from an earlier manuscript, probably from sixteenth-century Persia. The portion of the verse composed in the central border comes from Sa'dī's *Bustān* (*The Orchard*), a Persian classical text containing prose and poetry narrating short allegorical tales for moral and ethical teaching. The seven verses in the cartouches are from the first chapter of the book, "On Justice, Wisdom and Government," from a section titled, "On

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369 Jahara Begum, *Risāla-i šāhibiyya*, 90.

Dealing with Enemies.” The reader imagines a wise old man giving sage advice to a king or prince after the enemy has been defeated and taken captive (italics are mine):

When he asks for protection, treat him with kindness  
 Pardon him, but be aware of his trickery  
*From the council of a wise old man turn not away*  
*For the timeworn [elder] has experience*  
 And they uproot the stronghold from its roots  
*The youth with their strength, and the wise men with their council...*

The painting, which can be dated to around 1650-55, is similar in its function to the *Late Shāh Jahān Album* folio in which Mullā Shāh is shown preaching to his disciples from his own treatise (**Fig. 4.1**). That folio also reflects the growing prominence that a living saint could hold in the context of the Mughal court. Both paintings were made after 1646, when Mullā Shāh completed his *Risāla-i shāhiyya*, the opening of which is included in the border of **Figure 4.1**. By this time Dārā Shikoh had far outstripped his other brothers in courtly titles and privileges. Shāh Jahān preferred to send his other sons to battle while keeping Dārā by his side. In 1642 the emperor elevated him further by giving him the title of *Buland Iqbāl* (August Fortune), “an epithet that till then had been solely reserved for addressing Shāh Jahān.”<sup>370</sup> It is no surprise that Dārā, as the favored son who was constantly by the emperor’s side as advisor, successor and confidante, was able to gain support for his own spiritual guide at court. Sa’dī’s poem describes a sage who is wise because of his old age. It is possible that the artist exaggerated the whiteness of Mullā Shāh’s beard to more appropriately mirror the literary description, thereby making him a more suitable emblem of wisdom for the court. In other, more naturalistic

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370 Supriya Gandhi, “Mughal Self-Fashioning, Indic Self-Realization” (PhD dissertation, Harvard University, 2011), 31.

artworks, when the Mullā is shown even more aged, he always retains his greying hair. It is most likely that the artist responsible for this portrait was working from a template or drawing, rather than a portrait drawn from life.

Another incident that might have given Mullā Shāh further privilege and status as the central spiritual authority for Mughal royalty occurred in 1643. One evening during a festival of lamp lighting Jahānārā Begum, who was wearing thin muslin garments and covered head to toe in oil-based *‘aṭar*, caught fire in her quarters. Two of her handmaids perished while attempting to save her.<sup>371</sup> According to Shāh Jahān’s historians the critical burns nearly killed her and it took her a full seven months to recover. The official court history states that her recovery was made possible by her trip to Nizām al-Dīn’s shrine at Delhi. However, in Mullā Shāh’s collected writings, he posits himself as the spiritual agent that aided in her cure. In his *Muṣannifāt* there is a long panegyric poem with a prologue written in prose that explains (**Fig. 4.33**):

In answer to Emperor Shāh Jahān and his request to this *faqīr* [Mullā Shāh] to pray in favor of his child whose hands had been burnt by a flame. And the Emperor wrote back saying that the prayers of the *fuqarā* have been answered.<sup>372</sup>

Scholars such as Ebba Koch, Heike Franke and Supriya Gandhi have written extensively on how Islamic spirituality was used by both Shāh Jahān and Dārā Shikoh as a tool for political self-fashioning. It is evident from the two Shāh Jahān-period album folios depicting Mullā Shāh that the image of the saint was employed to stage a particular

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<sup>371</sup> For a detailed account of her burning and her recovery see, Muhammad Salih Kamboh, *‘Amal-i-Salih, or Shah Jahan Namah: a complete history of the emperor Shah Jahan*, ed. Ghulam Yazdani, vol. II (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1923), 415-417.

<sup>372</sup> Mullā Shāh, *Muṣannifāt*, British Library, Delhi Collection, MS Persian 1420, fol. 20b.

political persona by Mughal royalty, in which their pietistic projections became attached to a particular saint. But rather than assuming that such encounters between spiritual and worldly authorities *only* served to politicize sanctity, we should also consider the notion that, conversely, such interactions had the effect of sanctifying courtly politics.

In the preceding sections I have examined two distinct types of portraits of Mullā Shāh: those made for personal contemplation as single folios (**Fig. 4.27**), and those made for royal viewing in albums (**Fig. 4.32**). A third type, already discussed briefly, shows Mullā Shāh in the company of other saints—most regularly with his own *shaykh*, Miyān Mīr (**Figs. 4.19**). This group of paintings shows the unfolding of the concept of *dīdār*, or sacred viewing, and the transmission of spiritual knowledge from master to disciple.

Additionally, there are two intriguing artworks that appear to escape the three functions that I have outlined. One of them is a finely rendered drawing in the British Library collection, from the late Shāh Jahān period, which can be dated to between 1655 and 1658 (**Fig. 4.34**).<sup>373</sup> From his own writings it is well known that Dārā Shikoh frequently sought the company of living sages, traveling far and wide to seek advice on spiritual matters. Artists probably accompanied him on his visits to Mullā Shāh and other saints, and were commissioned to make portrait drawings. For court artists such as La'ichand and Chitarman, who were already well versed in depicting living royals and courtiers for the imperial atelier, rendering individualized portraits of living saints must have come easily. The delicate British Library drawing shows an aged Mullā Shāh in a three-quarter view, consoling a weeping elderly man. It is only one of two portraits that I have located in which the saint is not shown in full profile. Next to him sits a stoic,

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<sup>373</sup> See, Toby Falk and Milder Archer, *Miniature Paintings from the India Office Library*, 85, fig. 87.



younger disciple with a sensitively rendered thick, black beard (**Fig. 4.35**). Below him is one of the finest renditions of a doe to be found in Indian painting. Given the advanced age of the Mullā—visible from his wrinkling eyes and creased forehead—the painting is probably one of the last made during his lifetime. In contrast to the album page in which he is shown in a stiff profile (**Fig. 4.32**), the artist has made no attempt to stylize the figures in the drawing. Judging from its high level of skill and graphic sophistication, it is possible that an artist of the imperial retinue made the drawing during one of Dārā Shikoh's visits to the saint in Kashmir. It is also possible that it is a study for an, as yet, unidentified or lost painting.

In nearly all of the representations of Mullā Shāh that I have located, he is shown either as a solitary figure deep in meditation or as someone receiving or bestowing spiritual blessings. The second exceptional example is a remarkable painting from the Bharat Kala Bhavan in which the saint is depicted conversing with a mystic who appears to be a Kashmiri Śaivite ascetic (**Fig. 4.36**). Made in the late Shāh Jahān-period style (circa 1655), the painting bears witness to the cohabitation of two distinct Indian spiritualities. By the time Sufism was established in the tenth century, Kashmir was already a major center of non-dualist Śaivism.<sup>374</sup> In this environment Indian sufi orders appropriated yogic practices from various Indic traditions, such as the famous Rishi Sufi order of Kashmir established by Shaykh Nūr al-Dīn in the fifteenth century. In the Bharat Kala Bhavan example, Mullā Shāh is seated next to a river under the shade of a stooping tree, with a small town nestled in the hills in the background. With his black meditation stick resting at a diagonal next to him the Mullā converses with his guest. His position

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374 For a detailed insight into Kashmiri Śaivism see, Moti Lal Pandit, *An introduction to the Philosophy of Trika Śaivism* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 2007).

directly under the tree's canopy identifies him as the one being visited. In appearance Kashmiri Śaivites often could not be easily distinguished from their sufi counterparts.<sup>375</sup> It is only through the caste marks on the Śaivite's forehead and the two braids of hair hanging down from under his turban that we can recognize him as a follower of Śiva.

Apart from narrating a possible historical meeting between two Kashmiri spiritual luminaries, this painting can also be interpreted as a staging of Dārā Shikoh's own much-discussed inquiries into Hindu and Muslim spiritualities. An early eighteenth-century drawing confirms the Bharat Kala Bhavan painting's association with Dārā Shikoh's intellectual pursuits (**Fig 4.37**). The drawing shows the prince conversing with the same ascetic under the shade of a tall tree. It could very well be a study made from an unidentified painting from the Shāh Jahān period. In the Mullā Shāh painting it was the Śaivite who had approached the sufi saint. In the drawing it is now the Śaivite who is holding court, sitting on a tiger skin rug. The prince, with his sword lying nearby, has come to pay him a visit. The two figures have been misidentified by a later hand as "Nawāb 'Alī Vardī Khān" and "Faqīr Amjad 'Alī Shāh."<sup>376</sup>

There are many other drawings and paintings as well as written records of Dārā Shikoh visiting Hindu gnostics. The prince's growing interest in Vedāntin philosophy seems to have emerged from his participation in Indic Sufism. One of his most famous works titled *Majma' al-baḥrayn*, or *The Mingling of Two Oceans* (1655), uses references from the Upaniṣads and the Qur'ān to show the underlying metaphysical unity of both

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375 Lakshmanjoo and John Hughes have included some early-twentieth century photographs of Kashmiri Śaivites, in which the ascetics look surprisingly similar to sufis. See, Lakshmanjoo and John Hughes, *Self Realization in Kashmir Shaivism: The Oral Teachings of Swami Lakshmanjoo* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), plate 3, xix.

376 'Alī Vardī Khān was the ruler of Bengal from 1740 to 1756. He is a key figure in the history of eighteenth century politics.

traditions.<sup>377</sup> The other work of Dārā's that gained wide circulation after his death is *Sirr-i akbar*, or *The Great Secret* (1657), which is a commentary on the Upaniṣads. The Bharat Kala Bhavan painting, most likely made by Dārā's own artists, successfully connects two aspects of faith dear to the prince: his honored sufi guide and the underlying unity of Indian religions. The later drawing shows Dārā Shikoh cast as the ideal Indic ascetic-prince for eighteenth and nineteenth-century local rulers. Supriya Gandhi has discussed the widespread reception of Dārā Shikoh's writings, particularly his Persian commentary on the Upaniṣads during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Kashmiri paṇḍits working for local courts in Lahore and Kashmir played a major role in this dissemination. "Although the *Sirr-i akbar* provides no names of the paṇḍits involved in the translation, an association with the project had clearly come to hold significant capital in the historical memories of certain Kashmiri brahmins."<sup>378</sup> From this evidence it is possible to speculate that the eighteenth-century drawing was made in Lahore, and was probably a study for a final painting to be included in a later *Sirr-i akbar* manuscript.

By the end of the seventeenth century the genre of sufi portraiture was spreading rapidly into regional centers across the Subcontinent, including the Deccan, Kashmir and Avadh. Through a survey of the dissemination of Mullā Shāh's portraits we can see the process of localization and the transmission of the genre of devotional portraiture into regional styles. Although paintings of Mullā Shāh were made in various centers of patronage across North India, here I will focus only on Kashmir, to highlight one important regional center—a center whose artistic production in the early modern period

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377 Dārā Shikoh, *Majma'-ul-Bahrain or the Mingling of the Two Oceans*, translated by M. Mahfuz-ul-Ikhlaq (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1982).

378 Supriya Gandhi, "Mughal Self-Fashioning, Indic Self-Realization" (PhD dissertation, Harvard University, 2011), 244-246.

remains a great mystery for art historians.<sup>379</sup> (For a complete list of later images of the saint, see Appendix I.)

In centers such as Kashmir the selective naturalism witnessed in seventeenth-century examples is consciously attenuated in favor of a flattened representation of space. The subtle interplay between a graphic sensibility and three-dimensionality, favored in the Jahāngīr and Shāh Jahān periods, gives way to flat blocks of color that resist being read as naturalistic spaces or forms. The viewer is placed in an otherworldly hieratic space. After comparing the many known examples it becomes evident that images of sufi saints shift away from complex compositional schema in favor of direct and icon-like visions of sacred personages. The imagery is reduced to the most essential symbolic signifiers—elements that are chosen to help identify the saint in question.

A group portrait at the Victoria and Albert Museum containing a previously unidentified image of Mullā Shāh reflects the process of localization through which the Mughal genre of saints' portraiture spread and expanded (**Fig. 4.38**). In the Victoria and Albert example there is little resemblance to the saint's portraits made by imperial court artists, apart from the color palette and certain iconographic elements. Given the painting's marked difference in style, skill and imagery, and the fact that it served as a

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379 A now dispersed album made for a nobleman in Aurangzeb's court shows several paintings of key saints close to Dārā Shikoh and Jahānārā Begum. Probably made sometime in the 1690s, the album was gifted to the Raja of Mewar in Rajasthan in the early-eighteenth century. One folio is now in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, accession number EA1990.1287. Another folio, with a portrait of Shāh Dawla, was recently on sale in London at Francesca Galloway Gallery. Additionally, there are several eighteenth century paintings of Mullā Shāh made in the increasingly independent state of Avadh, in Uttar Pradesh. One intriguing example is of Miyān Mīr and Mullā Shāh shown sitting in a garden pavilion absorbed in the act of devotional gazing (see, Appendix I, fig. 27). The painting is ascribed to the artist Muḥammad Miskīn, who was active in Avadhi courts between circa 1760 and 1790. Most importantly, the artwork is pasted in the opening folio of the British Library's *Mathnawīyyāt-i Mullā Shāh*, one of the two compilations of Mullā Shāh's writings. Richard Johnson, the East India Company employee at the court of Avadh, acquired the manuscript in June 1782 at the capital, Lucknow. Given that the artist was active at the same time in the same region, it is likely that Muḥammad Miskīn made the painting for Richard Johnson. It was placed into the anthology when the manuscript was being rebound and restored. British Library MS, IO Islamic 578.

direct source for later portraits of Mullā Shāh made in Kashmir, I believe that it was made by a regional workshop removed from the imperial sphere. It is also likely that it was made after the death of the saint in 1661, when an exact likeness of the historical figure was less immediately available. I was able to identify Mullā Shāh in this image because of an almost completely intact *muraqqa* ' from Kashmir in the collection of the Lahore Museum dated 1699-1702 (**Fig. 4.39**). The *Kashmiri Album*, painted by the artist Muḥammad Mūsā, begins with a portrait of Mullā Shāh, identified by his name inscribed in gold at the top. It is an exact copy of the Victoria and Albert portrait. Both feature some of the trademarks of earlier, more direct representations of the saint: namely, his bulbous Afghani turban, portly stature and smiling countenance.

In 1657 the emperor Shāh Jahān fell seriously ill, and a war of succession broke out among his sons. Within a year Aurangzeb 'Ālamgīr emerged victorious, and after hunting down and executing Dārā Shikoh in 1658, proclaimed himself the Mughal emperor. At a time when the new emperor put all of his attention into expanding the Mughal territories, shrinking resources forced royal artists to look for patronage elsewhere, thereby enabling the spread of seventeenth-century Mughal style and iconography into regional courts throughout the Subcontinent. The Victoria and Albert painting could have been made during this early period of dissemination.

Compositionally, this painting belongs to the sub-genre of *majlis* works and echoes the many images showing Miyān Mīr in conversation with Mullā Shāh. Similar to the La'Ichand painting commemorating Dārā Shikoh's initiation, the leader of the order is seated on the right, addressing his senior disciple. In the Victoria and Albert example the

hierarchy is made even more evident by the enlarged scale of Mullā Shāh's figure and his placement slightly higher than the disciple opposite him.

I recently identified another painting by Muḥammad Mūsā that is an even closer, yet simpler, study of the Victoria and Albert image (**Fig. 4.40**). It shows the Mullā in the same setting as the aforementioned painting, but situated in a hieratic space rendered with large flat washes of pale color. Instead of Mullā Shāh giving *fez* to one of his Kashmiri disciples, it is now Miyān Mīr who is facing the Mullā. Along with the color palette and the flattened, simplified landscape, the figures of the two servants behind the saints are made in a typical eighteenth-century Kashmiri style, an aesthetic that dominates the *Kashmiri Album* from the Lahore Museum as well.

The *Kashmiri Album* begins with a portrait of Mullā Shāh seated with a book (**Fig. 4.39**). The saint is wearing a purple *jāma* with a Shāh Jahān-period *patkā* tied around his waist. The *patkā* with red floral motifs became popular in seventeenth and early eighteenth-century Pahari painting, and is found in almost all the major schools of painting in the hill states of Punjab. Another distinctly Shāh Jahān-period Mughal element is the muted color palette. The malachite green of the background is a typical backdrop for seventeenth-century Mughal portraits of individual figures. Although simplified and flattened, the composition indicates the shift from a Mughal-centric visual language to a local idiom. The rendering of the Mullā's face and *jāma* also exemplifies a simplified variation of the seventeenth-century Mughal rendering technique called *pardākht*.<sup>380</sup> The tiny parallel lines and visible cross-hatching marks used for shading fall within Pahari stylistic parameters. The flatly applied pastel palette and the broadly

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380 The word *pardākht* used by local Indian painters comes from the Persian infinitive verb *pardākht* which means to render, defray, disburse.

handled brushwork with stark, wiry outlines evidence the Kashmiri sub-style of this series. Unlike the imperial artists who would have had direct contact with Mullā Shāh, and worked with drawings made from life, the Kashmiri artists are now working from pictures of pictures.

Many other portraits in the series depict saints within specifically localized settings that highlight a transcultural sharing of Indic elements (**Fig. 4.41**). A number of saints have *yoga-paṭṭās* as meditation aids bound around their legs; they use the meditation crutches utilized by both sufis and jōgīs to rest their arms; and they are often depicted sitting under the shade of a tree on an elevated platform. Most of the images have flat, muted backgrounds with a lighter band of sky at the very top, harking back to medieval conventions of painting. Occasionally a building is introduced behind the seated figures. The abstracted, flattened spaces inhabited by the sages reinforce the fact that these images are intended as axiological symbols, rather than as merely historical portraits. There is no attempt to follow any rules of naturalism, and the negotiation between Renaissance-inspired elements and local painterly conventions is completely absent here. The images very clearly represent an otherworldly space.

The colophon on the frontispiece of the Kashmiri *muraqqa'* provides further evidence regarding the collection's motivations. The first page is unfortunately missing, but the second leaf clearly defines the patron's fundamental purpose for compiling this album of saints (**Fig. 4.42**). In a deliberately high register invoking the Qur'ān, the patron of the manuscript has written in Persian:

... to remember in order to be benefitted from that (continuing from the missing first page). I thought that, since I have the means and capacity, I should endeavor to preserve/protect the names of the saints and elders.

However, due to my many concerns regarding worldly matters and owing to various calamities and misfortunes I could never accomplish this. Until, in the year 1111 AH (1699) a lover and follower of the Dervishes, the generous Muḥammad Mūsā, a painter, showed me some pictures he had made of these *shaykhs*. Because the pictures of these saints facilitate the protection/preserving of their names, I gradually began to collect them, page by page. In the year 1114 AH (1702) this lowly one (the patron) sewed them (the pages) together. May those who contemplate on these pages remember this *faqīr* (poor one) with a prayer of well-being.

Importantly, the Persian-speaking patron, whose identity is unknown, uses the Arabic word *ḥifẓ* rather than the usual word for remembrance, *ẓikr*, from which the word *taẓkira* is derived. It is significant that he does not use the more local Persian term *yād*, which means to remember. The word *ḥifẓ* comes from the same root as *ḥāfiẓ*, which is usually used to describe someone who has memorized the Qur’ān by heart. The term literally means to protect or preserve, and implies safekeeping. When perusing an album such as this one, the viewer/devotee must have endeavored to memorize the names of saints, as well as their visages, thereby imbibing their individual qualities. In various sufi branches chanting the names of the previous saints of the lineage leading back to the Prophet of Islam (*silsila*) is part of the daily method. These litanies offer the practitioner access to the saints, who are believed to act as intercessors between the supplicant and God. It is also poignant to note that the patron of the *Kashmiri Album* has used the metaphor of sewing to describe the act of assembling and binding this collection. The already discussed word *muraqqa’*, which literally means “patched,” has strong associations with the patched cloak worn by sufis as a sign of spiritual poverty.<sup>381</sup> The patron’s metaphor of sewing the album together page by page poetically evokes the image of a dervish completing his mendicant garb patch by patch.

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381 Wright and Stronge, *Muraqqa*, xvii.



In conclusion, the aim of this chapter has been to locate the key historical moment for the development and expansion of the genre of sufi portraiture. By identifying important examples from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, this analysis sheds light on the various modalities of spiritual remembrance intimately connected to paintings commissioned for an expressly devotional purpose. The final sections of the chapter explore the fascinating examples of Mullā Shāh and Dārā Shikoh—two practitioners of *taṣavvuf* who were not only subjects of artworks but also vehicles of cultural transmission. The hidden figure of Jahānārā Begum looms similarly large in view of the genre's inner motivations, expansion and persistence well into the nineteenth century.

Additionally, it must be said that Mullā Shāh is only one in a long list of sufi masters who served as vital nodes in networks of cultural exchange. Uncovering further interactions between patrons and practitioners of Sufism will deepen our understanding of the conceptual underpinnings of Muslim devotional portraiture in South Asia. A comprehensive survey of the genre also promises to shed light on important confluences between *taṣavvuf* and other forms of Indic spirituality, thereby unveiling as yet undiscovered instances of trans-sectarian sharing.

## CONCLUSION

### *A Gathering of Mystics:*

#### **Mapping the Past, Present and Future of the Study of Muslim Devotional Painting**

A curiously ambitious painting from the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum—dated by scholars to the last decade of Shāh Jahān’s reign—attempts to capture the multidimensional devotional landscape of mid-seventeenth-century Mughal India, as seen through the eyes of Dārā Shikoh—and possibly Jahānārā Begum (**Fig. 1.5**).<sup>382</sup> An eccentric relative of the *majlis* paintings that emerged under the royal siblings’ patronage, the composition consists of an odd patchwork of scenes stitched together into a large single painting showing a gathering—or gatherings—of Indic ascetics. Keeping true to South Asian pictorial conventions, the vertical page is divided into five distinct horizontal registers, each containing particular groups and activities. Taken as a whole, the scene appears to represent the “feast day,” or death anniversary (*‘urs*), of Mu’īn al-Dīn Chishtī at his shrine in Ajmer. Similar to the sacred gatherings discussed in Chapter Four, the various vignettes in the painting show mystics from different eras and communities congregating in one timeless space. The topmost register, which forms the backdrop for the main space, includes Roman buildings glimpsed through a row of tall columns, an architectural vignette which has been copied directly from a Renaissance print. It probably represents the *dargah* of Mu’īn al-Dīn Chishtī. Toward the right side of this register the building ends abruptly, opening onto a vast plain

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382 For other discussions of the painting see, Elinor W. Gadon, "Dara Shikuh's mystical vision of Hindu-Muslim synthesis", 153-157; and Supriya Gandhi, "Mughal Self-Fashioning, Indic Self-Realization" (PhD dissertation, Harvard University, 2011), 130-131.

with mountains visible in the receding background. The ochre field is bubbling with activity typically witnessed during *'urs* celebrations at South Asian sufi shrines (**Fig. C.1**). In the top left corner of the distant scene a crowd of tiny, sketchily drawn onlookers sits watching a wrestling match. Below them is a group of acrobats. To their right, in the center of the open space, is a snake charmer with a pet mongoose and two cobras. To his right some disciples are shown intently listening to a lecture. Below this group are two figures lighting lamps around a large lamp burner, and a crowd surrounding a circus performance in which a goat is doing a precarious balancing act. In front of this *mise-en-scène* of minute figures is a long, disorderly row of sufis being gazed at intently by two rather confused-looking Europeans standing at the extreme left (**Fig. C.2**). An ascetic who is possibly a Qalandar is also pictured among the crowd; wearing a striped blue robe and a leather bag, he looks away from the main group, in the opposite direction. Next to him is a swaying African sufi. The majority of the figures in this register are oriented toward two central personages shown facing each other. The sufi in the white robe on the left, with a brown *chādar* draped around him like a cape, is immediately recognizable as Khwājā Qutb al-Dīn Bakhtiyār Kākī. He is shown in a similar profile and attire in the *majlis* paintings discussed in Chapter Four (**Figs. 4.21 and 4.22**). An inscription above him also confirms his identity. With his left arm resting on a walking stick and counting beads with his other hand, Kākī faces another sufi, who is likely to be his spiritual preceptor Mu'īn al-Dīn Chishtī, the founder of the Chishtī order in India.<sup>383</sup> Immediately behind Chishtī is none other than Mullā Shāh, smiling gently with his customary shawl draped over one shoulder (**Fig. C.3**). Mu'īn al-Dīn Chishtī and Mullā Shāh are the only

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383 Both Gadon and Gandhi have suggested this attribution.

figures in the painting with leather-bound volumes in their hands. It is possible that the entire register illustrates a haphazard—though joyous—mingling of the two main rivers of Indian Sufism: the Qādirīyya and the Chishtīyya.

Most of the sufis in the prominent top row appear to be oblivious to the antics unfolding in the large open square before them. Here, devotees divided into two registers are shown dancing wildly to *qawwālī* music. Represented in an intentionally comic light by the artist, they personify different stages of spiritual “intoxication,” ranging from prancing ecstasy to a full swoon. There are several later paintings and drawings in which snippets from this section have been copied as individual compositions (**Fig. C.4**), attesting to the painting’s enduring popularity in eighteenth and nineteenth-century North India. In addition to being a who’s who of well-known sages and religious “types,” the composition may have appealed to other artists who were intrigued by its experimentation with novel, European-inflected ways of representing the figure—for example, the perspectival view of the face of the fainting man, or the bird’s eye view of the reeling dancer who has lost his turban.

If the main scene where the dervishes are dancing is understood to be a large elevated platform, then the lowermost register of the composition is its base (**Fig. C.5**). Mughal mosque and mausoleum architecture typically features large plinths that are decorated with arch motifs (**Fig. C.6**). Echoing the idea of the plinth base, the arches in the lowermost register of the painting act as both niches and subtle haloes for a row of twelve non-Muslim sages who embody distinct strains of Indic spirituality. According to Supriya Gandhi the group represents, “a broad cross-section of monistic thought and popular theistic expression” that Dārā Shikoh became increasingly attracted to in the

1650s. The group includes the popular saint Kabīr—who is bare-chested and wearing a cap with a peacock feather—with his son Kamāl Dās shown wearing a patched cloak and the mysterious *janeu*-like cord worn by many Qalandars and other antinomian mystics. While Kamāl’s hagiographical significance has been debated, Kabīr has long been a symbol of non-dualism for both Hindus and Muslims alike. Most hagiographies of Kabīr that were written in South Asia in the Persian language describe him as a follower of the Chishtī order who at the same time continued monist practices under the guidance of Swāmī Rāmānanda. The bottom group also includes the Jahāngīr-period saint Jadrūp, whose image was discussed in Chapter Three. All of the figures in the row of arches have been labeled in Persian.<sup>384</sup> Their sensitively rendered portraits served as prototypes for many later individual representations of the sages during the eighteenth century (**Fig. C.7**).

The registering of the composition establishes a visual hierarchy in which the sufis occupy the most privileged status. While sufis from different epochs and *ṭuruq* are shown mingling, the non-Muslim monists are framed in a separate space. Conceptually, the large painting can be understood as a visualization of the interrelated communities of Indic spirituality as envisioned by Dārā Shikoh in his *Ḥasanāt al-‘arīfīn* (1652). The text, which Dārā conceived as a riposte to critics among the narrow-minded exoteric *‘ulemā*, also follows a similar progression. In it he compiles utterances from many of the great sufis, among them his own guides, followed by sayings from local Indic saints including Kabīr, Jadrūp and Swāmī La’l Dās, all of whom are also depicted in the painting. As I have discussed in Chapter Two, *Ḥasanāt al-‘arīfīn* acts as a bridge between Dārā’s earlier

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384 From left to right they are, Ravīdās, Pīpā, Nāmdev, Sen, Kamāl, Aughur, Kabīr, Machandar (Matsyendranāth), Gorakh (Gorakhnāth), Jadrūp, La’l Swāmī, and Chetan Swāmī (?)

sufi-centric interests and his later engagement with Indic monism. In both *Hasanāt* and the painting sufis are privileged through their sheer number and the space that they occupy. However, the monist group is presented in a contemplative and dignified manner, perhaps suggesting that they are a foundation for the larger spiritual community. If we accept that the artwork mirrors the book—which was completed in the year 1652—then we can narrow its dating from the currently recognized circa 1650-58 to circa 1652-54.<sup>385</sup>

I conclude with a discussion of this extraordinary painting because it is clearly a vessel containing many of the major themes that I have explored in this project: most notably, the coming together of Indic and Persianate devotional expressions; the representation of sacred viewing between saints; Dārā Shikoh's unique patronage and literary persona; and images of Mullā Shāh. But of even greater significance is the composition's status as a veritable *muraqqa'* patchwork of South Asian devotional culture. It is a hermetic treasure map containing clues that beckon toward many intriguing directions for future research.

This dissertation has focused primarily on identifying the genre of devotional paintings made for a specifically Muslim audience in early modern South Asia. Chapter One presented a brief historiographical discussion in which I examined the glaring absence of scholarship addressing this ubiquitous theme of Indian painting. I also outlined my research methodology, through which I have endeavored to collate contemporaneous literary sources with the artworks in question, while also incorporating perspectives from religious discourse, cultural studies and political history.

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385 For its dating see, Deborah Swallow and John Guy, *Arts of India: 1550-1900* (London: V&A Publications, 1990), 93.

Because my project attempts to open new ground I found it necessary to first outline the possible motivations for the representation of sufi saints in a devotional context. In Chapter Two I identified conceptual premises drawn from Islamic thought. During the research process I discovered that viewing the saint or spiritual guide is of utmost importance in the philosophy and practices of Sufism. Rather than envisioning the representation of saints as a syncretistic borrowing from Hinduism, I have argued that for the practitioners and patrons of Sufism, it was a truly Islamic concept that found fertile ground in the devotional climate of South Asia.

Initially, I had intended for my research to focus primarily on Jahānārā Begum, Dārā Shikoh and Mullā Shāh. However, as I began to delve deeper into seventeenth-century devotional representation in North Indian painting I noted clear continuations from previous eras of patronage. Even though the royal siblings expanded the landscape of Muslim devotional painting, they were building on well-established precedents, both literary and visual. In Chapter Three I identified key devotional themes and their artistic expressions in India prior to Jahānārā Begum and Dārā Shikoh's patronage.

Having established important cultural precedents, in Chapter Four I showed how these conventions led to the creation of a new genre within the field of devotional painting under the patronage of the two siblings. The catalyst, I argued, was Jahānārā and Dārā's attachment to a local sufi order. Rather than utilizing sufi signifiers for political or rhetorical aims, they were in fact active participants in Islamic spirituality. Because of this particular focus, representations of generic sufi types were eclipsed by portraits of revered historical sages and living saints. In Chapter Four I also argued that Jahānārā Begum's unique circumstances as a high-ranking Mughal noblewoman in *pardah*

contributed to her concrete need for images of her *shaykh*. Through original translations of Jahānārā's writings and others I have confirmed that the princess utilized representations of Mullā Shāh as a support for her esoteric spiritual exercises. This practical requirement enabled the forging of a new meditative sub-genre in which portraits of individual saints took on icon-like qualities and functions.

In order to do justice to the sprawling field of Muslim devotional painting in early modern India, I have focused the present research on identifying the phenomenon, including the role of its key patrons. A logical next step would be to examine the reception of this genre as it spread during the eighteenth century. At the end of Chapter Four I mapped one example of this continuation by focusing on the legacy of Mullā Shāh portraits produced in the regional style of his home context in Kashmir. In Appendix I, I have compiled a catalogue of the known Mullā Shāh images that I have collected over the course of my research. It seems inevitable that more will emerge with time.

If we move beyond images of Mullā Shāh we find that series representing portraits of other sufi saints became popular in the eighteenth century across South Asia. I have located two distinct series from Punjab and Deccan at the Lahore Museum that need to be investigated in detail (**Figs. C.8 and C.9**). All the saints have inscriptions identifying them. Many can be mapped through their iconography as well. Knowing who the saints are and which orders they represent can give us valuable information about the spread and popularity of *ṭuruq* across the Subcontinent. It can also help us identify the particular locations of their patronage. Another fascinating album containing more than 90 portraits of sufi saints was made in 1796 for the ruler of Mysore, Tīpū Sulṭān, at a time when his small kingdom was besieged by enemies. Studying the album in light of Tīpū Sulṭān's



own diaries would give us more insight into his patronage, and his association with Sufism. Similar to the *Kashmiri Album* discussed in Chapter Four, the *Tīpū Sulṭān Album* also begins with a preface that clearly outlines the function and role of the portraits. Taking David Roxburgh's examination of Safavid album prefaces as a point of reference, I intend to study the two aforementioned eighteenth-century albums of saints to better understand their position in the larger history of the Islamic album.<sup>386</sup> A comparative study such as this would also reveal how these collections differ in their function from the more typical *muraqqa'* format. Both albums have yet to be examined by scholars.

Throughout their writings Jahānārā and Dārā Shikoh cite other important sufi saints who need to be further identified and studied. I have already collected images of paintings depicting key figures from the mid-seventeenth century, such as the Jewish-born mystic Sarmad, the briefly discussed Shāh Dilrubā and Shāh Dawla. Similar to images of Mullā Shāh, all three had a legacy that continued at least into the late eighteenth century. For instance, I have located representations of the controversial Sarmad—beheaded on the order of Aurangzeb—in Kashmir, Avadh and the Deccan (**Fig. C.10**). Additionally, as discussed earlier, the Victoria and Albert Museum's *Gathering of Mystics* became the model for paintings of the popular saint Kabīr (**Fig. C.11**).

Depictions of the saint and his companions promise to shed light on the reception of monist mysticism in late-seventeenth and eighteenth-century Muslim circles. There are several late Mughal paintings that focus on Kabīr's group. Why was he so popular? Who were the patrons and why were they so attracted to this milieu that claimed to be detached both from exoteric Islam and Hinduism? In a similar vein, in Chapters Three and Four I

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386 David J. Roxburgh, *Prefacing the Image: The Writing of Art History in Sixteenth-Century Iran* (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

touched upon the antinomian group of sufi mystics known as the Qalandars. This inscrutable religious community needs to be studied in further detail, taking into account their significant impact on Indo-Muslim culture from the medieval period to the present day.

The very models established under Dārā Shikoh and Jahānārā's patronage in the seventeenth century went on to influence portraits of Sikh gurus under the patronage of Ranjīt Singh in nineteenth-century Punjab (**Fig. C.12**). More research needs to be carried out to explore these links and continuities. This avenue of inquiry opens onto a compelling larger subject, which is the persistence of visual and literary conventions through the most disruptive period in the history of South Asia: the colonial period. In his essay, "The Material and Visual Culture of British India," Christopher Pinney situates local Indian artistic expression in the colonial period under three distinct categories: "transculturation," "purification" and "autonomy."<sup>387</sup> He describes the term "autonomy" as a form of cultural production "capable of creating its own history free from the shadow of colonialism."

In the historiography of British-period Indian art the primary scholarly focus has been to highlight hybrid networks of interaction between South Asians and the British—interactions that fall under Pinney's categories of "transculturation" and "purification." Frequently ignored in both colonial and postcolonial historical discourses of the Subcontinent are the intrinsic values of local patrons, rulers and populace that quietly subsisted despite the pressures of change and dislocation. Images of sufi saints, abundant

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<sup>387</sup> Christopher Pinney, "The Material and Visual Culture of British India," in *India and the British Empire*, ed. Douglas M. Peers and Nandini Gooptu (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 232.

in shrines across South Asia to this day, are a key instance of one form of “autonomous” image-making. Although they have clearly modified with time, they are an example of the iconographic continuity manifested by indigenous systems of cultural production (**Fig. C.13**). Research into the continued visualization of saints in contemporary India and Pakistan would provide an intriguing framework for considering the autonomy of devotional representation and its persistence into the present day (**Fig. C.14**).

And finally, with Jahānārā’s hidden legacy in mind, I propose that scholars of art history and other adjacent fields pay serious attention to another key theme that has yet to be systematically explored: women as patrons, practitioners and subjects of devotional artworks in the early modern period. There are hundreds of paintings in major collections all over the world that depict women devotees, yoginis and sufis (**Fig. C.15**). Was Jahānārā’s patronage a remarkable anomaly, possibly linked to the sub-genre of images of female devotees, or were there other female patrons who contributed to its popularity? Was her niece, Zebunnisā, daughter of Aurangzeb and a well-known poet and sufi, also a patron of devotional portraiture? Surprisingly little scholarly attention has been given to this highly cultivated princess, even though—very much like Jahānārā—she is known to have been a patron of gardens and architectural projects, and wrote an entire *Dīvān* of devotional poetry.

This dissertation has endeavored to initiate new dialogues about this important and widespread theme in South Asian painting. The research I have conducted so far is a small offering toward what I hope will become a more extensive map of this complex and fascinating nexus of South Asian religion, history and cultural studies.

## FIGURES



**Figure I.1:** The *vān* tree at the shrine of Bībī Pāk Dāman

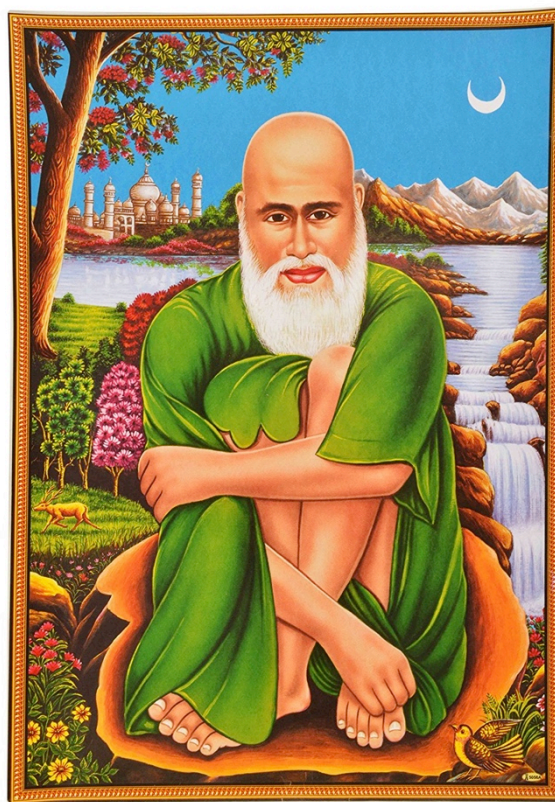


**Figure I.2:** Lighting lamps at the shrine of Bībī Pāk Dāman





**Figure I.3:** The street leading to the shrine of Bībī Pāk Dāman



**Figure I.4:** Poster of Bābā Tāj al-Dīn (d.1925), circa late-20<sup>th</sup> century





**Figure I.5:** A *silsila* poster from the shrine of Bībī Pāk Dāman, circa 21<sup>st</sup> century

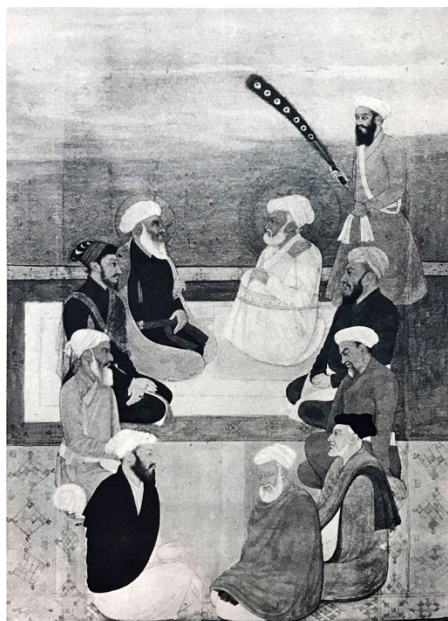


**Figure I.6:** A sacred gathering (*majlis* painting), circa 1820, Faqir Khānā Collection, Lahore Museum (199-D-55)



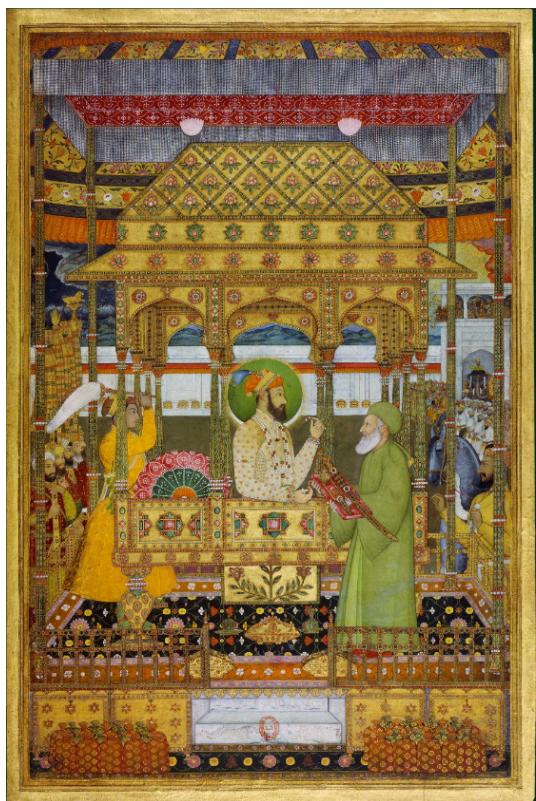
**Figure I.7** (left): Miyān Mīr, circa 1780-1800, Lahore Museum (F-21)

**Figure I.8** (right): The commemoration of Dārā Shikoh's initiation (detail), attributed to La'lchand, circa 1640, Sackler Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution (S1986.432)



**Figure I.9:** Painting commemorating Dārā Shikoh's initiation, circa 1640 (with possible 19<sup>th</sup> century additions), Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh Album, Gulistan Palace Library, Tehran, (Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh Album, fol. 14)

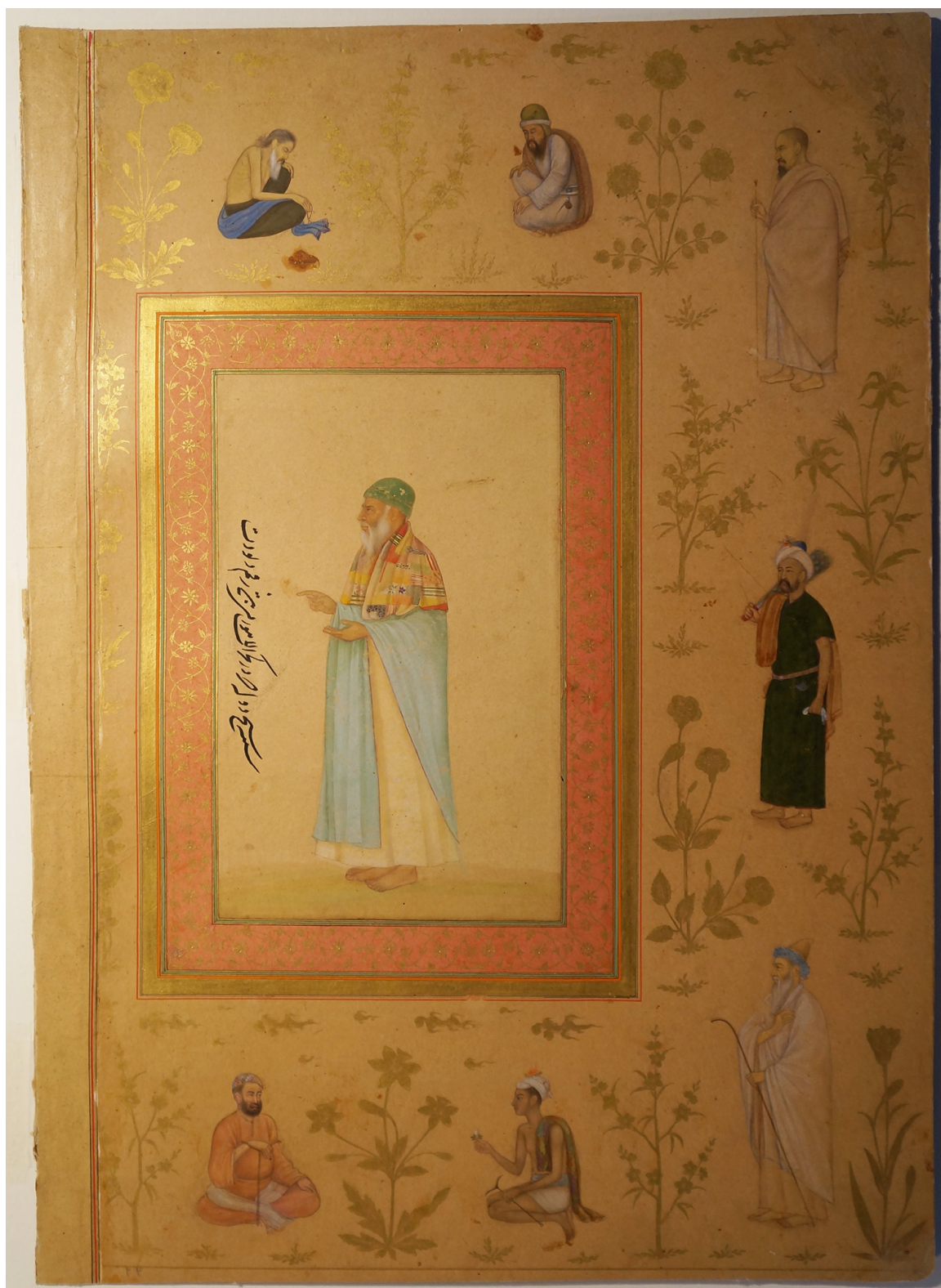




**Figure 1.1** (left): ‘Azīm ush-Shān receiving investiture from Khizr, 1712, Bibliothèque nationale de France, département des Manuscrits, Paris (Smith-Lesouëf 249, pièce 6557)

**Figure 1.2** (right): Khizr, circa 1720, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris (Od 60 pet. Fol. f.19)





**Figure 1.3:** Shāh Dawla, from the *Late Shāh Jahān Album*, circa 1650, Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (CBL In 07B.25)





**Figure 1.4:** A sufi master initiating a disciple (possibly Mullā Shāh with Dārā Shikoh?), by Jalāl Qulī, circa 1655, Ackland Art Museum, Chapel Hill (2009.21)



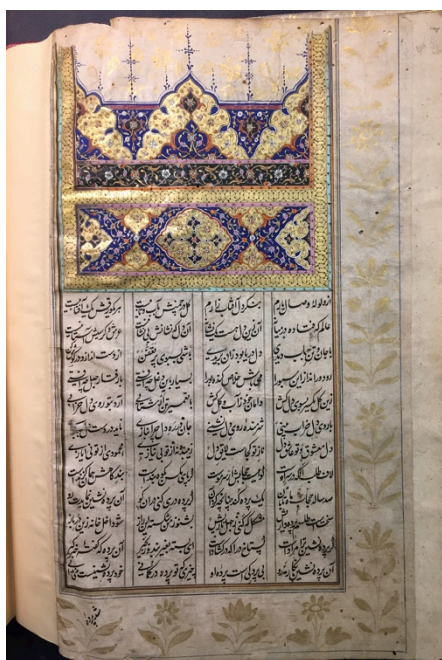


**Figure 1.5:** A gathering of Indic mystics, circa 1652-54, Victoria and Albert Museum, London (IS.94-1965)

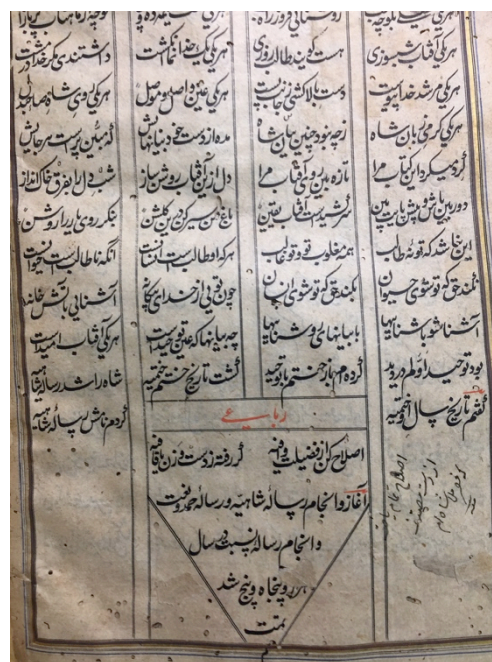




**Figure 1.6:** Ibrāhīm ibn Adham, circa 1740, Morgan Library, New York (M.458.32)



**Figure 1.7 (left):** Frontispiece of *Mathnavi-yāt-i Mullā Shāh*, British Library, London (IO Islamic 578, f.1b)

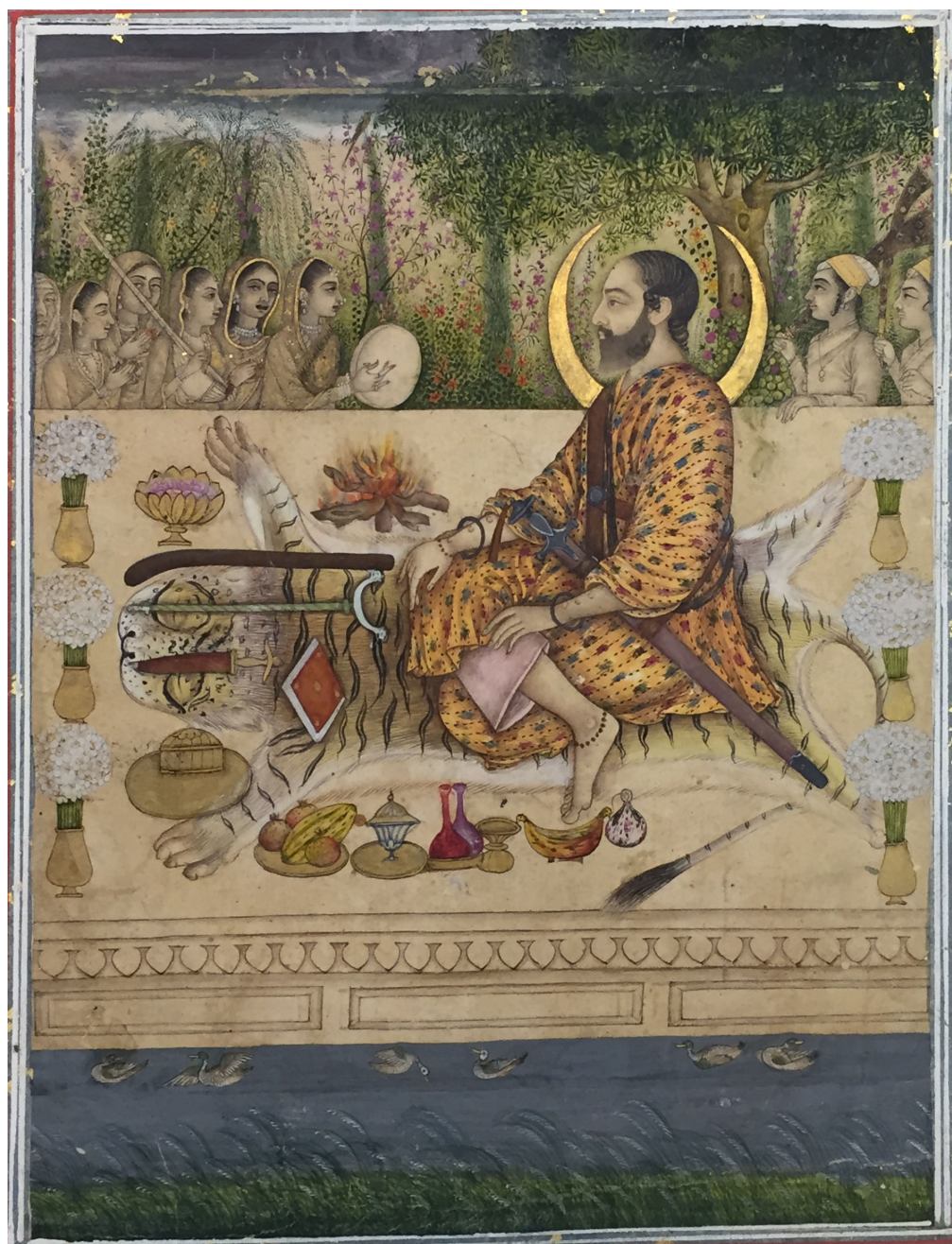


**Figure 1.8 (right):** Colophon of *Mathnavi-yāt-i Mullā Shāh* with his own signature on the bottom right, British Library, London (IO Islamic 578, f.283b)





**Figure 1.9:** *Mū'nis al-arvāh*, probably in Jahānārā Begum's own handwriting, British Library, London (Or 5637)



**Figure 2.1:** A Qalandar sufi, circa 1720-40, British Library, London (J.19.2)





**Figure 2.2:** Muḥammad receiving the revelation from the angel Gabriel, from the *Jami' al-tawārikh*, 1307 CE, Edinburgh University Library (Ms.Or.20)



**Figure 2.3:** Dancing dervishes, from a *Dīwān* of Ḥāfīz, circa 1480, Metropolitan Museum, New York (17.81.4)



**Figure 2.4:** Emperor Bahādur Shāh I paying to homage to his ancestor Shāh Jahān who appears on a *darśani jharokā* circa 1707-12, Morgan Library, New York (M.458.27)



**Figure 2.5:** Miyān Mīr and Mullā Shāh, circa 1645, Yale Art Gallery, New Haven (2001.138.59.)





**Figure 2.6:** Muḥammad's ascent into heaven, from Nizāmī's *Khamsa*, 1539-43 CE, British Library (Or. Ms 2265, f.195)









**Figure 2.9:** An Egyptian Qalandar, circa 1640-60, Deccan, Cleveland Museum (2013.289)





**Figure 2.10** (left): Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā', from the Punjabi series of sufi saints, circa 1780-1800, Lahore Museum (f-11)



**Figure 2.11** (right): Shāh Daula, from the dispersed *Suhrāb Khan Album*, circa 1690, Francesca Galloway Gallery, London



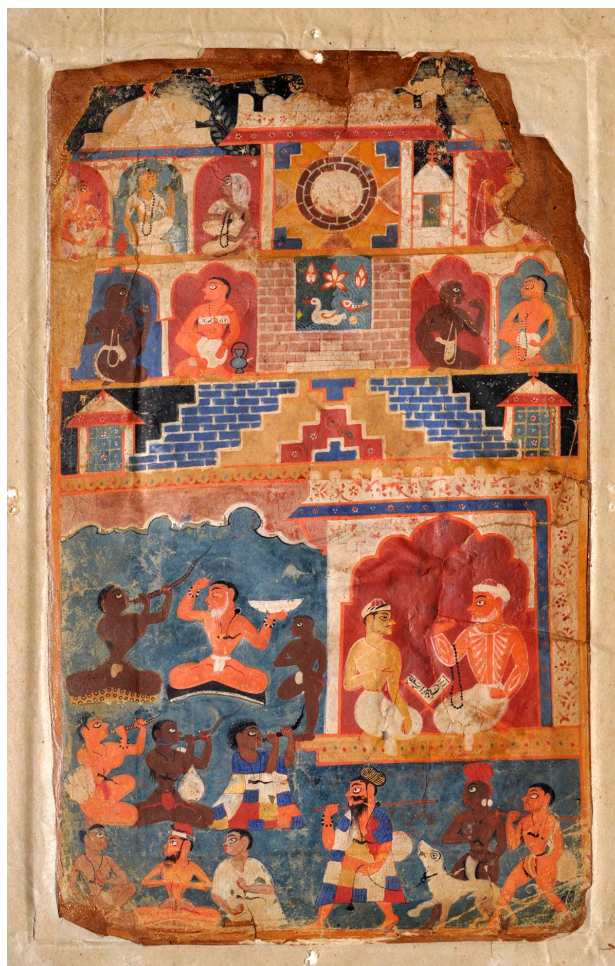
**Figure 2.12:** Khwāja ‘Abdullāh Ahrār, circa 1620, British Museum, London (1974.617.10, f.2)

**Figure 2.13:** Women visiting Shāh Madār at night, circa 1760, British Museum, London (1974.617.10, f.14)





**Figure 3.1:** Prince visiting an ascetic, circa 1595, Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (11A.75)



**Figure 3.2:** The temple complex, circa 1500-1550, Lahore-Chandigarh *Chandāyan*, Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh (K-7-30-H)



**Figure 3.3:** The temple complex (detail), circa 1500-1550, Lahore-Chandigarh *Chandāyan*, Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh (K-7-30-H)





**Figure 3.4:** Description of Chandā's beauty, circa 1500-1550, Lahore-Chandigarh *Chandāyan*, Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh (K-7-30-I)



**Figure 3.5:** Description of Chandā's beauty (detail), circa 1500-1550, Lahore-Chandigarh *Chandāyan*, Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh (K-7-30-I)





**Figure 3.6:** Description of Chandā's beauty, circa 1500-1550, Mumbai *Chandāyan*, CSMVS, Mumbai (57.1/4)





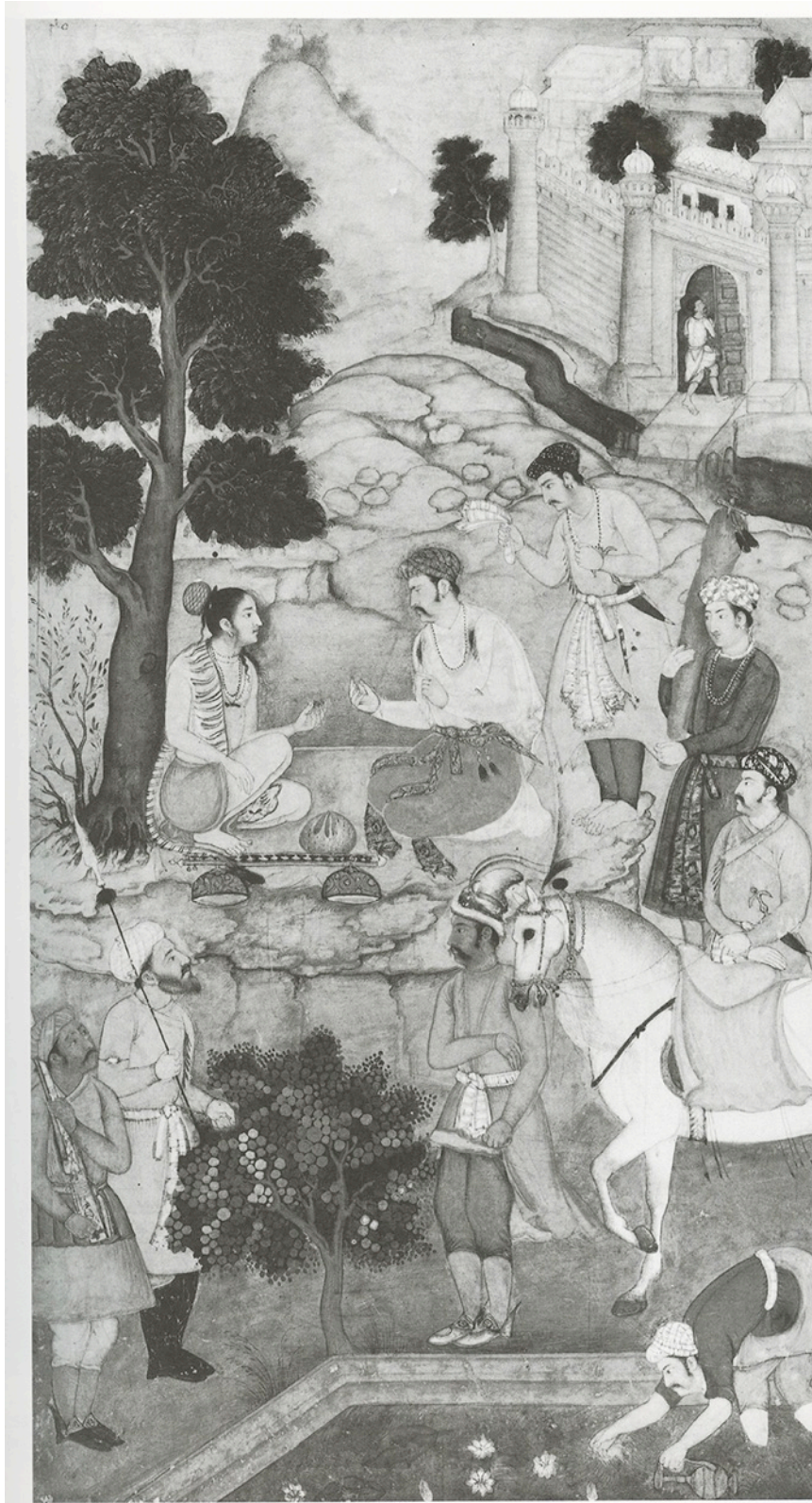
**Figure 3.7:** Rājkuṇwar begins his journey, from the *Rājkuṇwar Romance*, circa 1603-4, Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (In 37.23b)





**Figure 3.8:** Prince Farīdūn shoots an arrow at a gazelle, from Nizāmī's *Khamṣa*, by Mukund, 1595, British Library, London (Or. 12208, fol. 19r)





**Figure 3.9:** Rājkuṇṇwar with a king, *Rājkuṇṇwar Romance*, attributed to Haribans, circa 1603-4, Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (In 37.25r)



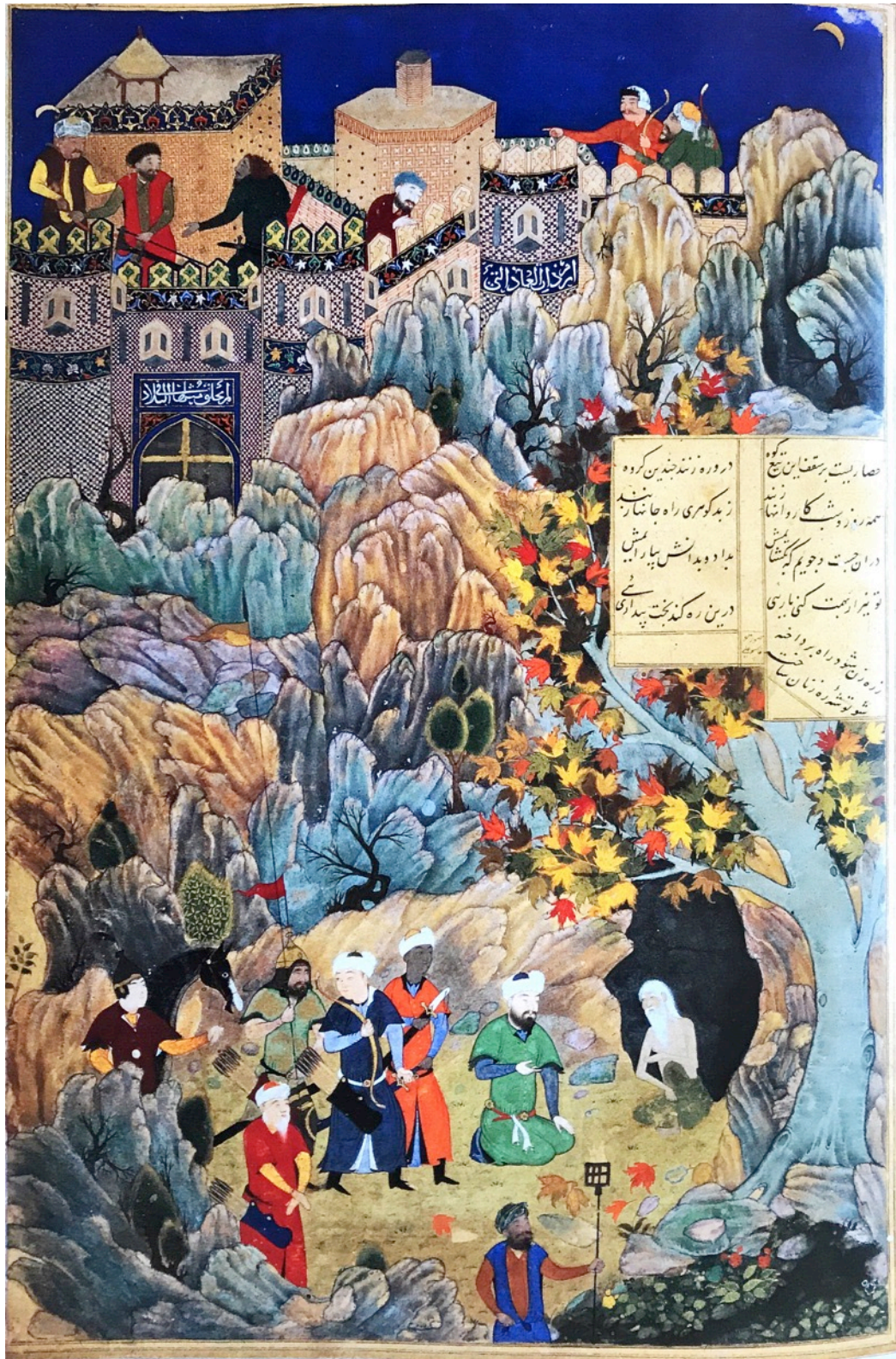


**Figure 3.10:** Akbar and a dervish, by ‘Abd al-Ṣamad, circa 1590, Agha Khan Museum, Toronto (on loan to the Metropolitan Museum, New York)



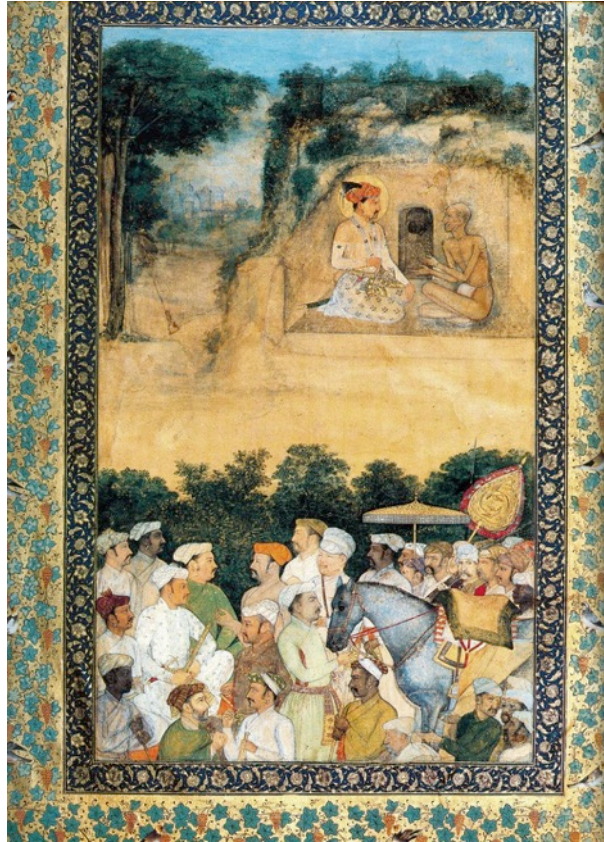
**Figure 3.11:** Shāh Dilrubā, ca. 1645, Late Shah Jahan Album, Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (In 07B.23b)



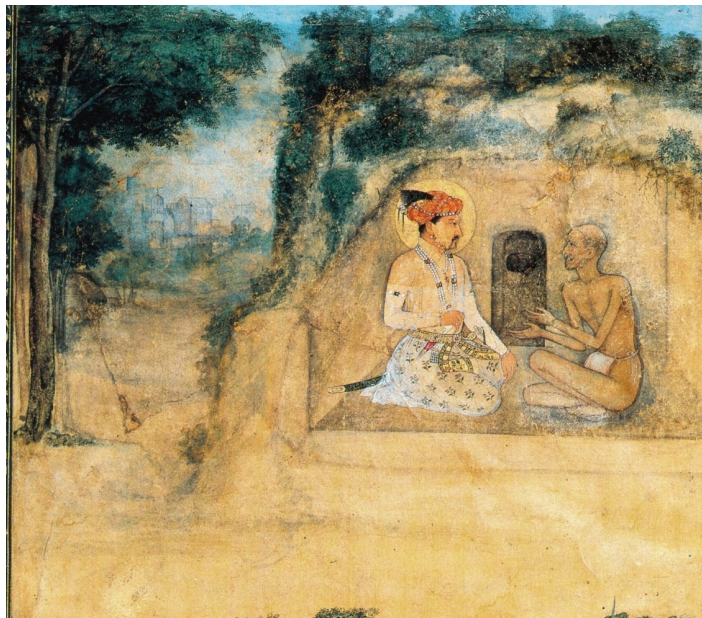


**Figure 3.12:** Alexander and the Hermit, from Nizāmī's *Iskandarnāma*, by Behzād, British Library, London (Or.6810, fol.273r)



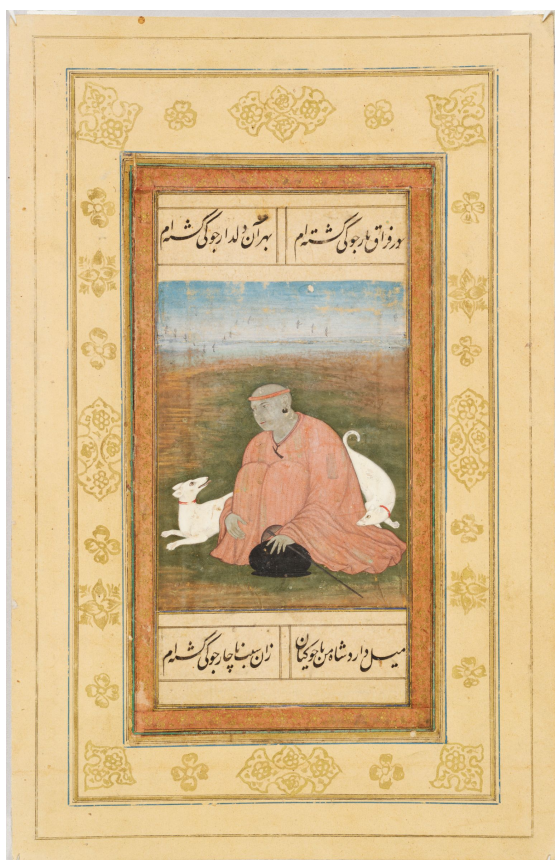


**Figure 3.13:** Jahāngīr visiting Chitrūp/Jadrūp, by Govardhan, circa 1620, Musée Guimet, Paris (No. 7171)

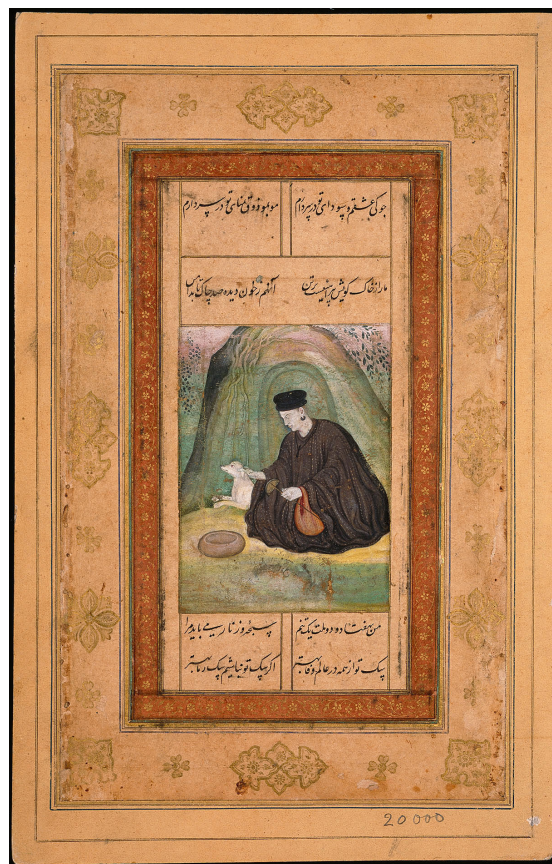


**Figure 3.14:** Jahāngīr visiting Chitrūp/Jadrūp (detail), by Govardhan, circa 1620, Musée Guimet, Paris (No. 7171)





**Figure 3.15** (left): Yogi, from the *Salim Album*, circa 1599-1604, Harvard Museums, Boston (2002.50.29)



**Figure 3.16** (right): Yogi, from the *Salim Album*, circa 1599-1604, Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (In 44.3)



**Figure 3.17** (left): Nāth yogi doing yoga, from the *Baḥr al-Hayāt*, circa 1600, Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (In 16.10r)



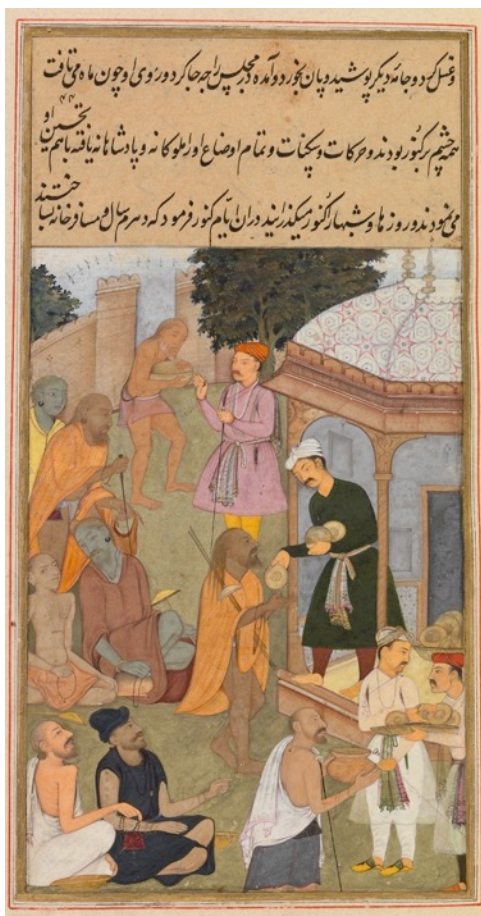
**Figure 3.18** (right): A disciple and his guide, from the *Salīm Album*, by Basāvan, circa 1585, Cleveland Museum (2013.296)



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نامه داراشکوه بادشاهزاده بشاه دله را  
 الله الله اخلاص کوناگون و عشق فراوان و محبت شکر و تسلیات نبکی بیکاه آن ذات مقدس  
 علی از جانب این بی جانب برسد و امید که قبول افتد این بنده شرمندہ خود را که بعبادت نامہ و شکر  
 سر بلند و سرفراز ساخته بود و رسید و کمال بیعت و سر ملندی بخشید این درجه لایق آن که  
 آن شاه متحقق و عین الرحمان این راستانید و در باره این فقیر شوق فرماید خود تو گفتی بنده من  
 از عرش بگذرد خنده من ۳ ای در صفت ذات تو حیران که دمه ۴ در جبهه جهان خدمت درگاه  
 تو به ۵ ای شاه فقیران این فقیر همیشه اشتیاق ملازمت آنحضرت در خاطر می باشد تا  
 کدام وقت این وصل در دیدن این تما از سر بر شود ۶ هر گاه ایام دل تقصیرت ۷ خواه  
 اگر ایام خواه در لایم ۸ امید که این کمترین سکان درگاه خود را فراموش نکند ۹ من گفتم  
 اندر چه تمام چه حکم ۱۰ تا هر چه سکان باشد ۱۱ هم ۱۲ در قافله که دوست دانهم ترسم ۱۳ این بسکه  
 رسد دور بانک جبرسم ۱۴

**Figure 3.19:** A letter from Dārā Shikoh to Shāh Dilrubā, from the *Fayyāz al-qawānīn*, British Library, London (Or 9617)



**Figure 3.20:** The prince distributing bread, from the *Rājkuṇṭhar Romance*, circa 1603-4, Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (In 37.44b)



**Figure 3.21:** The prince distributing bread (detail), from the *Rājkuṇṭhar Romance*, circa 1603-4, Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (In 37.44b)





**Figure 3.22** (left): A Qalandar sufi, by Mukund, circa 1595, formerly the Sven Gahlin Collection (current location unknown)



**Figure 3.23** (right): A Qalandar sufi, attributed to Basāvan, circa 1590, Harvard Art Museums, Boston (2009.202.255)





**Figure 3.24:** Two wandering dervishes, from Tabriz, Iran, late-15<sup>th</sup> century, Khalili Collection (MSS 619)





**Figure 3.25:** Shāh Sharaf Bū 'Alī Qalandar, circa 1760, Murshidabad, British Library, London (Add.Or.738)



**Figure 3.26:** Begtāshī dervish, circa 1590, British Museum (1983,0727,0.1)



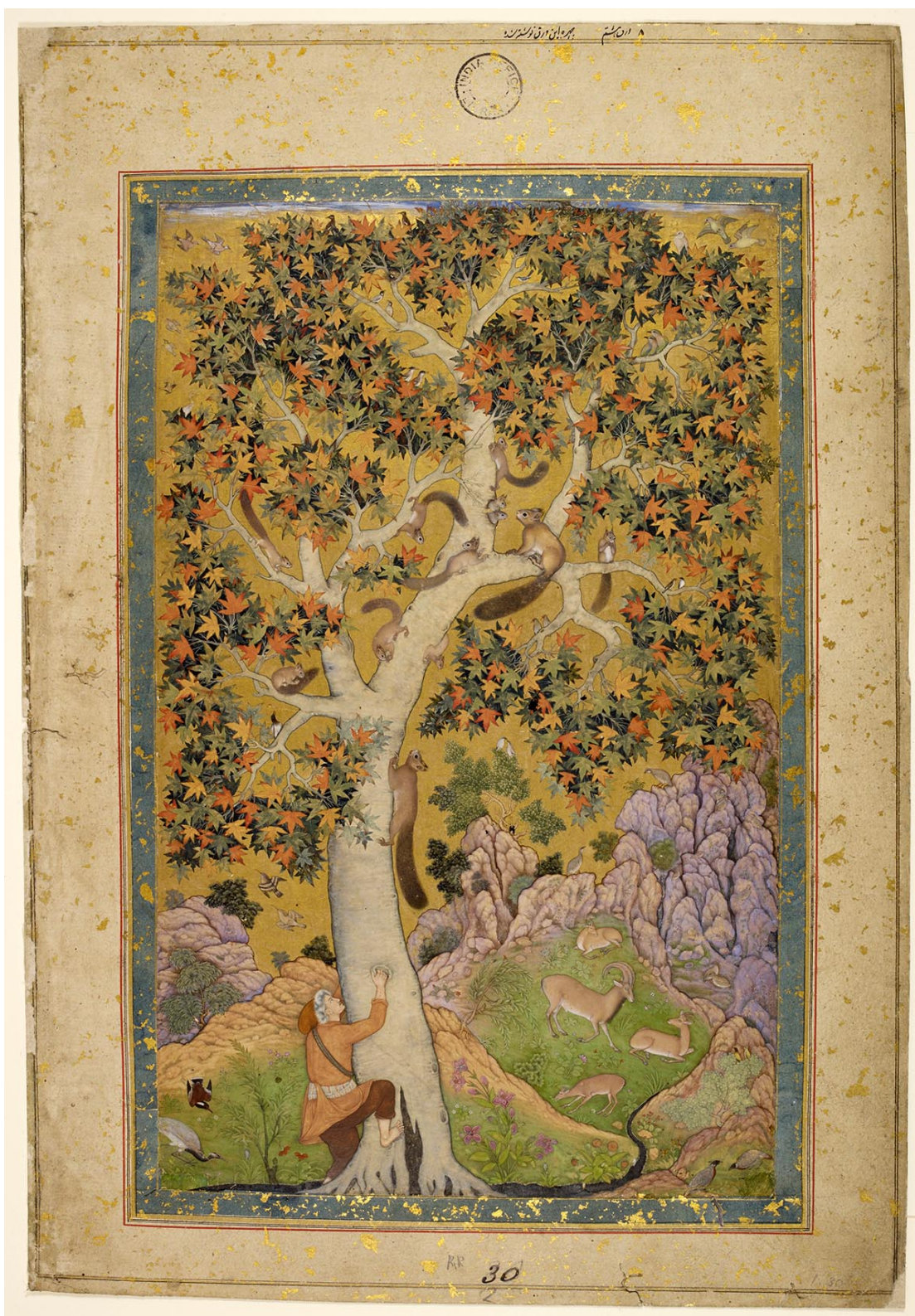
**Figure 3.27:** Folio from a Turkish album of costumes, circa 1610, British Museum (1928.3.23.46, 101b)





**Figure 3.28:** A Qalandar dervish, circa 1590, Persian, Musée Guimet, Paris (MAO 1219)



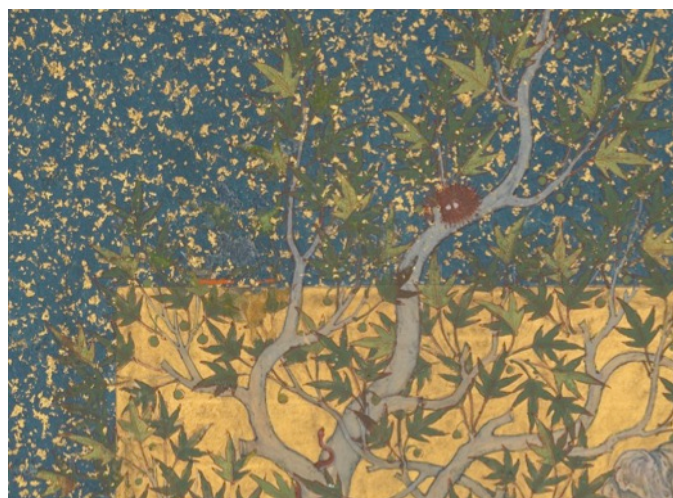


**Figure 3.29:** A dervish climbing the Tree of Life, by Abu'l Hasan, circa 1608, British Library, London (J.1.30)





**Figure 3.30:** A dervish climbing the Tree of Life (detail), by Abu'l Ḥasan, circa 1608, British Library, London (J.1.30)



**Figure 3.31:** Folio from 'Atṭār's *Conference of the Birds*, by Ḥabīballāh of Savā, Iran, ca. 1600, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (63.201.11)



**Figure 3.32** (left): A dervish climbing the Tree of Life (detail), by Abu'l Ḥasan, circa 1608, British Library, London (J.1.30)



**Figure 3.33:** Kabīr and other ascetics, by Mīr Kalan Khān, circa 1770-75, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (2009.318)



**Figure 3.34:** Shāh Ḥusayn Qalandar, circa 1770, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris (Od 60 pet. f.30)





**Figure 3.35** (left): folio from the *Gulshan Album*, 1610/11, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin (Libri pict. A 117, ff.6b)

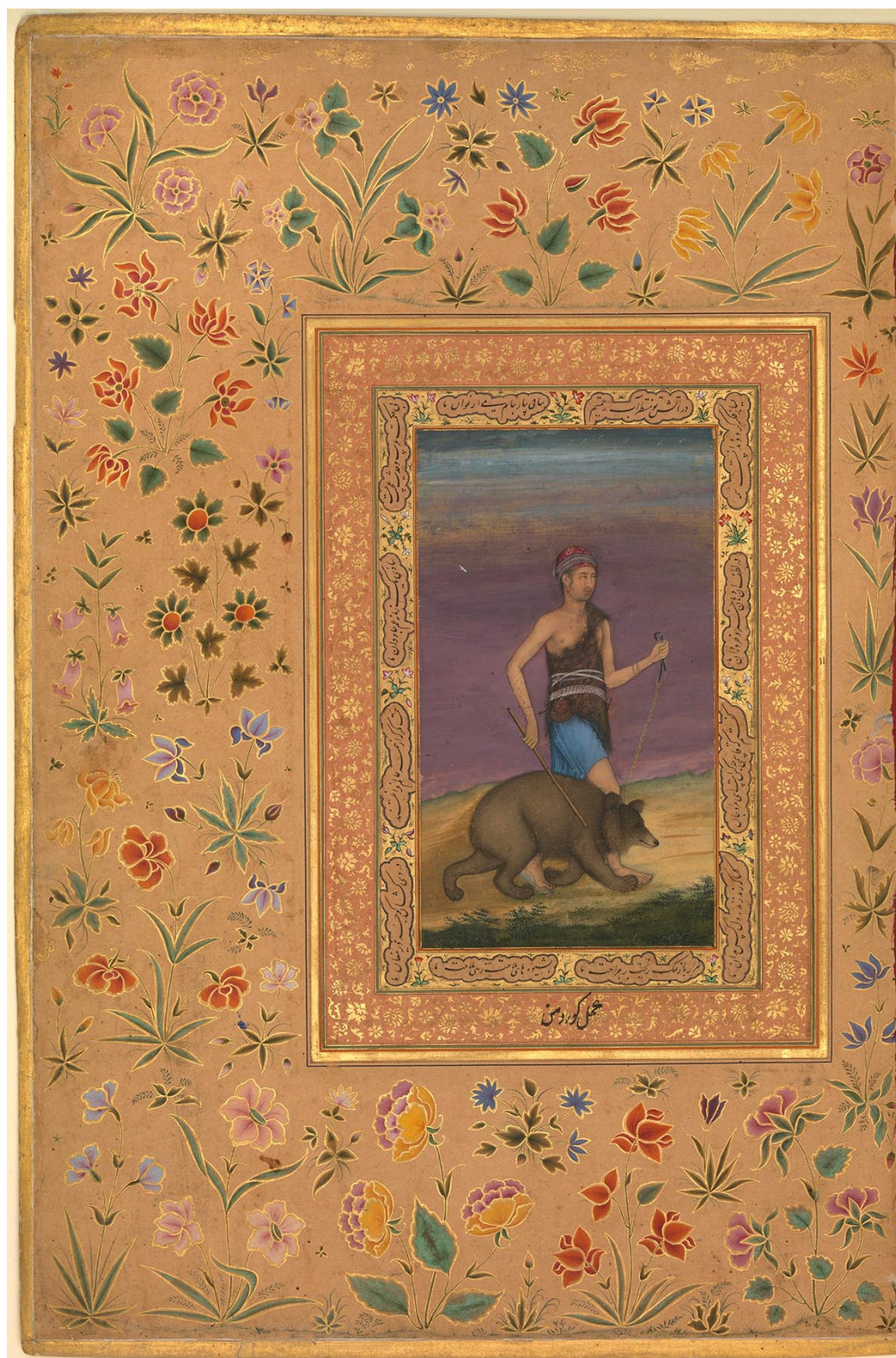


**Figure 3.36** (right): folio from the *Gulshan Album*, 1610/11, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin (Libri pict. A 117, ff.13a)



**Figure 3.37:** Three sufis listening to music, circa 1635-40, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris (Od 43.f.2)





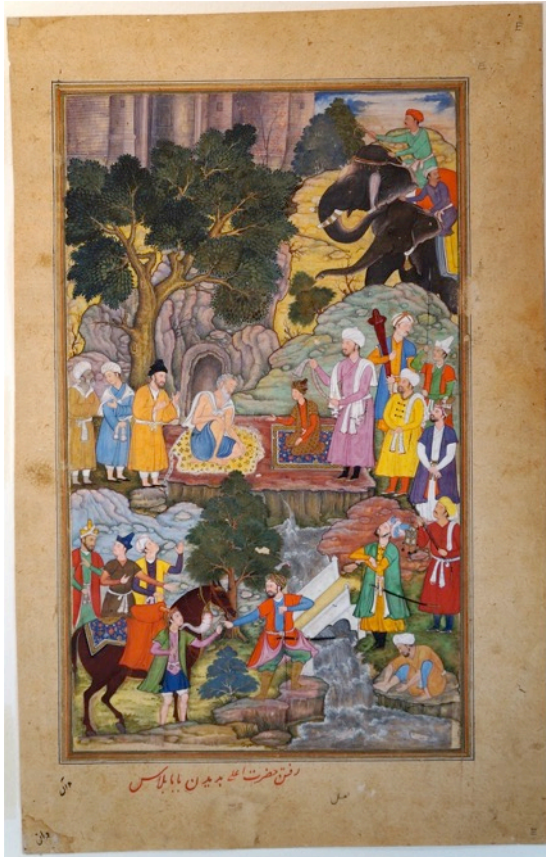
**Figure 3.38:** Madāri Qalandar with a bear, by Govardhan, Late Shah Jahan Album, circa 1635, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (55.121.10.10)



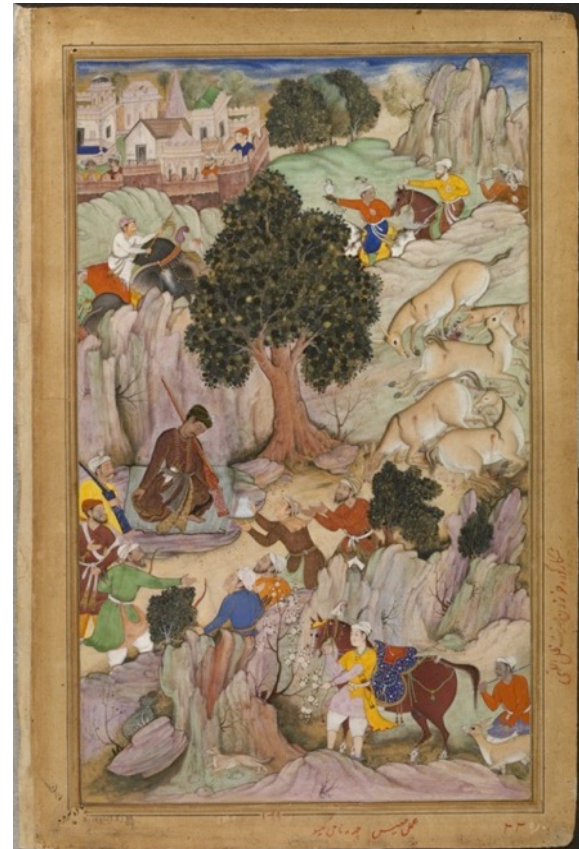


**Figure 3.39:** Madāri Qalandar with a lion, by Padārath, Late Shah Jahan Album, circa 1635, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (55.121.10.11)





**Figure 3.40** (left): Akbar visits Bābā Bilās, from the *Akbarnāmā*, circa 1587, Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (11A.26)



**Figure 3.41** (right): Akbar goes into a trance, from the *Akbarnāmā*, by Mahesh and Kesav, circa 1587, Victoria & Albert Museum, London (IS.2–1986, folio 84)





**Figure 3.42:** A young Akbar visiting an ascetic, attributed to 'Abd al-Ṣamad, circa 1580, Agha Khan Museum, Toronto (AKM122)





**Figure 3.43** (left): Mu'in al-Dīn Chishtī, from the *Minto Album*, by Bichitr, circa 1610-18, Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (07A. 14a)

**Figure 3.44** (right): Jahāngīr holding the globe of the two worlds, from the *Minto Album*, by Bichitr, circa 1610-18, Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (07. 5a)



**Figure 3.45:** Jahāngīr preferring Shaykh Ḥusayn to monarchs, from the *St. Petersburg Muraqqa'*, by Bichitr, circa 1615-18, Freer Gallery of Art, Washington D.C. (F1942.15a)

**Figure 3.46:** Jahāngīr preferring Shaykh Ḥusayn to monarchs (detail), from the *St. Petersburg Muraqqa'*, by Bichitr, circa 1615-18, Freer Gallery of Art, Washington D.C. (F1942.15a)

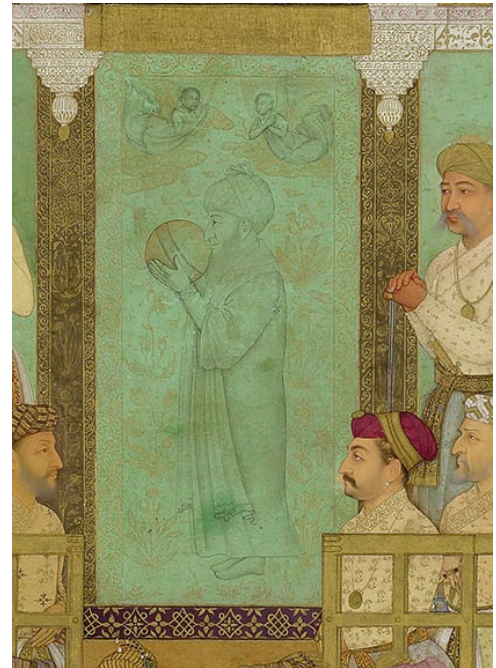
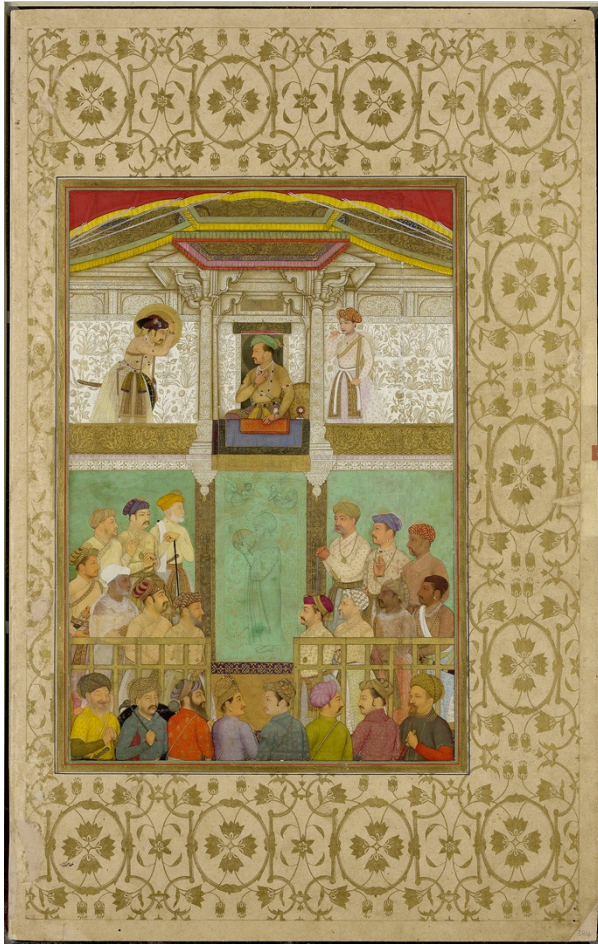




**Figure 3.47** (left): Shāh Jahān appointing the noble Maḥābat Khan to the position of commander in chief from the *Late-Shāh Jahān Album*, by Ābid, circa 1629-30, Sackler Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C. (S1986.406)



**Figure 3.48** (right): Miyān Mīr, circa 1635, British Library, London (J.7.11)



**Figure 3.49:** Prince Khurram's departure to the Deccan, from the *Pādashāhnama*, attributed to 'Ābid, circa 1635, Royal Collection Trust, Windsor Castle (1005025, f.192b)

**Figure 3.50:** Prince Khurram's departure to the Deccan (detail), from the *Pādashāhnama*, attributed to 'Ābid, circa 1635, Royal Collection Trust, Windsor Castle (1005025, f.192b)





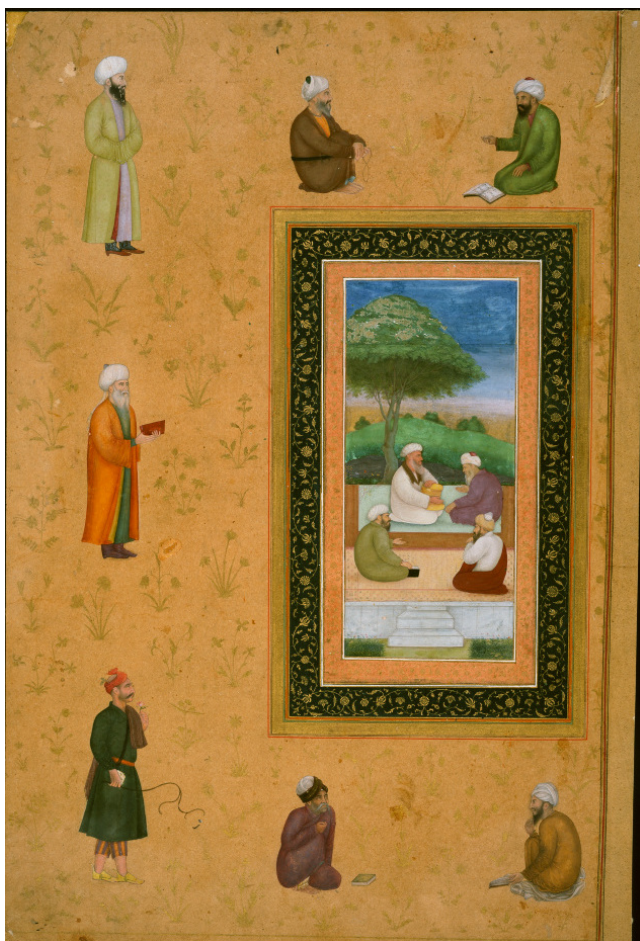
**Figure 3.51:** Shāh Jahān visiting Ajmer, from the *Pādashāhnama*, attributed to Jālāl Qulī, circa 1656, Royal Collection Trust, Windsor Castle (1005025, f.205b)





**Figure 3.52:** Shāh Jahān receives the elixir of life from the Prophet Khizr, from the *St. Petersburg Album*, by Bāl Chand, circa 1625-1630, Museum of the History of Religion, St. Petersburg (M-7992-VII-1r).





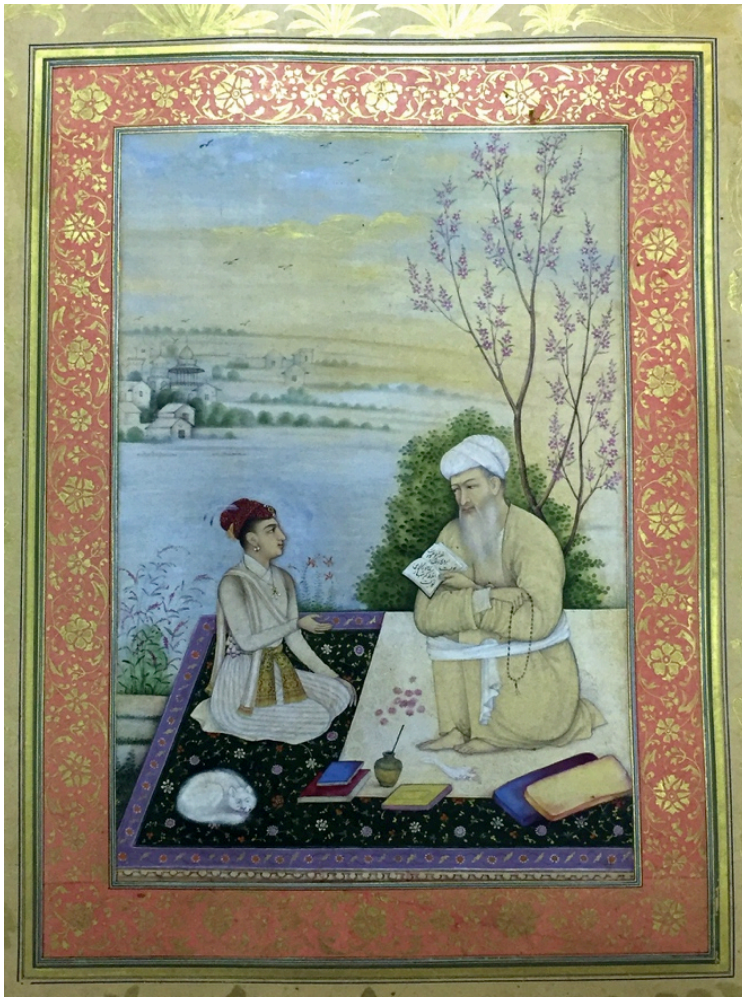
**Figure 4.1** (left): Mullā Shāh giving a sermon, from the *Late Shāh Jahān Album*, circa 1646, Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (In 07B.39)

**Figure 4.2** (right): Mullā Shāh giving a sermon (detail), from the *Late Shāh Jahān Album*, circa 1646, Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (In 07B.39)



**Figure 4.3:** Rūmī comes riding on a mule, illustration to a hagiography of Rūmī, 16<sup>th</sup> century, Library of the Topkapı Sarayı Museum, Istanbul

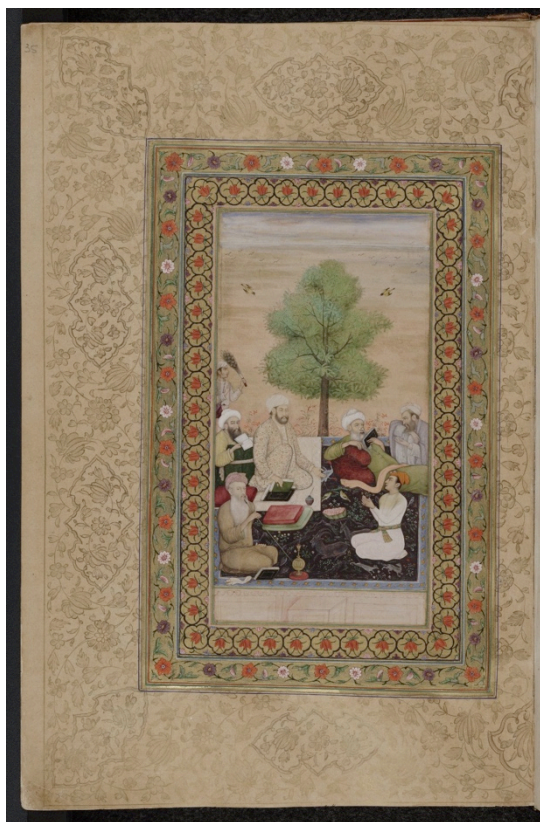




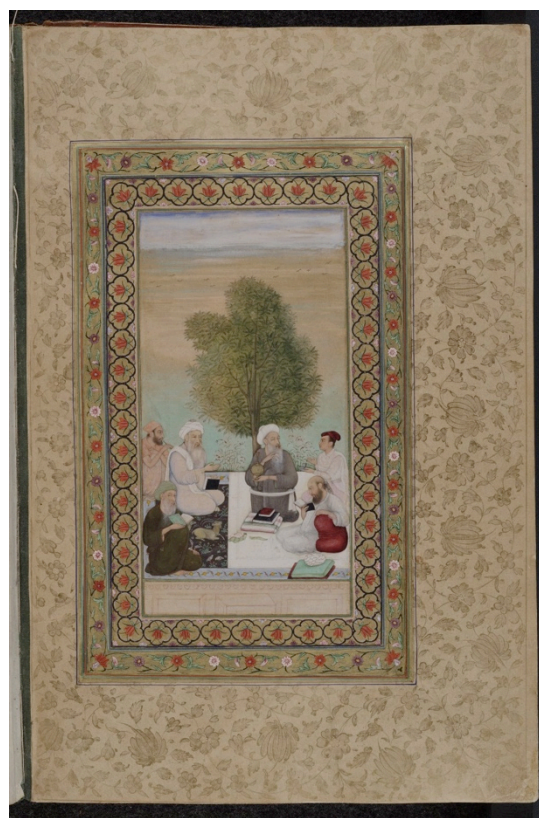
**Figure 4.4** (left): Dārā Shikoh in a lesson, *Dārā Shikoh Album*, circa 1630-34, British Library, London (Add Or 3129 f.18)



**Figure 4.5** (right): Dārā Shikoh in a lesson, *Dārā Shikoh Album* (detail), circa 1630-34, British Library, London (Add Or 3129 f.18)

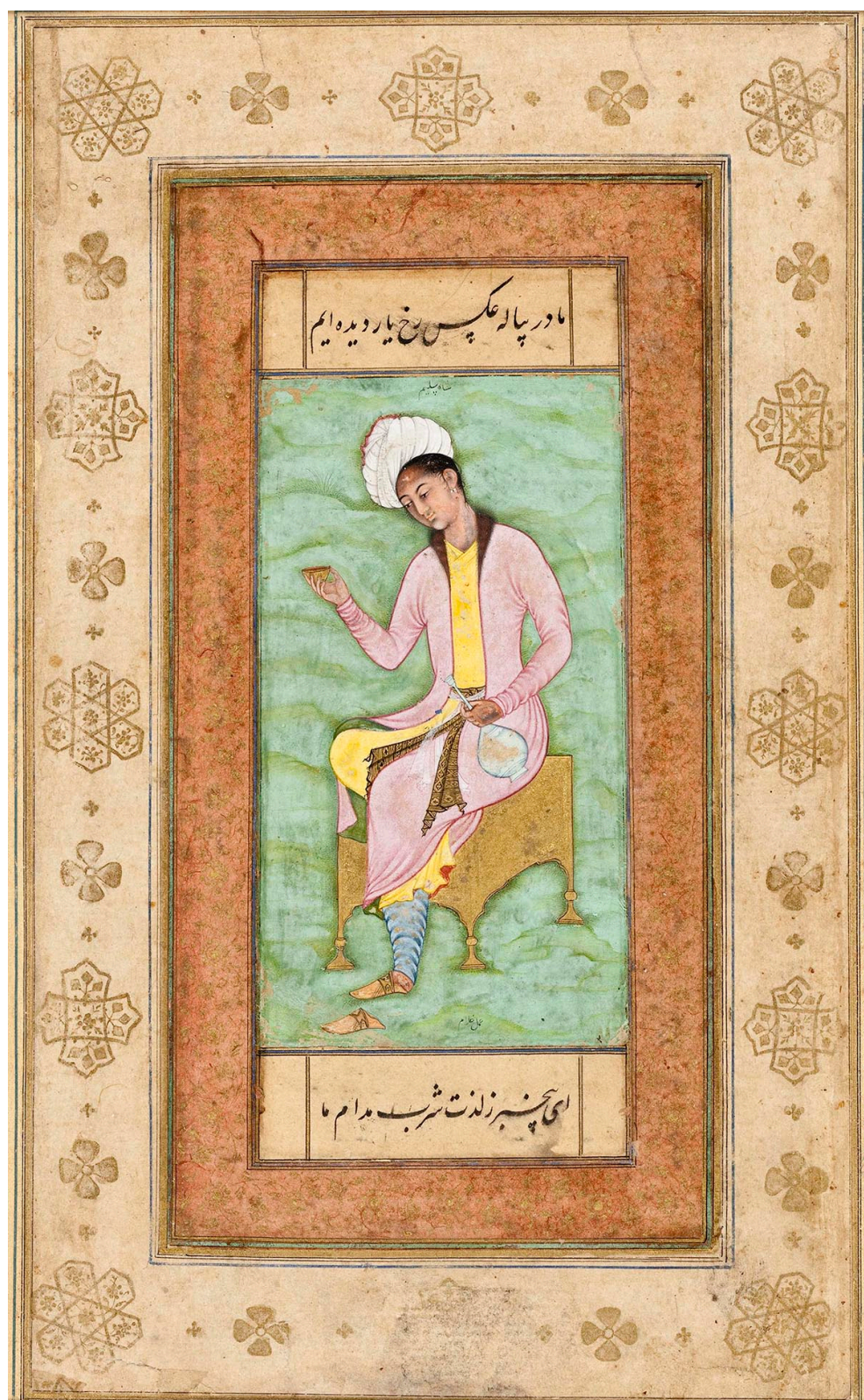


**Figure 4.6** (left): Dārā Shikoh with dervishes, circa 1630-34, Bodleian Library, Oxford (Ms. Douce Or.a.1, fol. 35a)



**Figure 4.7** (right): Dārā Shikoh with dervishes, circa 1630-34, Bodleian Library, Oxford (Ms. Douce Or.a.1, fol. 34b)





**Figure 4.8:** Prince Salīm with an awry turban, by Ghulām, from the *Salīm Album*, circa 1600-05, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, L.A. (M.81.8.12)





**Figure 4.9:** Prince Salīm reciting poetry, from the *Gulshan Album*, circa 1610, Musée Guimet, Paris (OA 7154)





**Figure 4.10** (left): A Qalandar sufi reciting a poem, from the *Dārā Shikoh Album*, circa 1630-34, British Library, London (Add Or 3129 f.48)

**Figure 4.11** (right): A prince possibly Dārā Shikoh holding a narcissus, from the *Dārā Shikoh Album*, circa 1630-34, British Library, London (Add Or 3129 f.47v)



**Figure 4.12:** Miyān Mīr and disciples, circa 1638-40, Walters Art Museum, Baltimore (W.696)



**Figure 4.13:** Miyān Mīr and disciples (detail showing Mullā Shāh), circa 1638-40, Walters Art Museum, Baltimore (W.696)

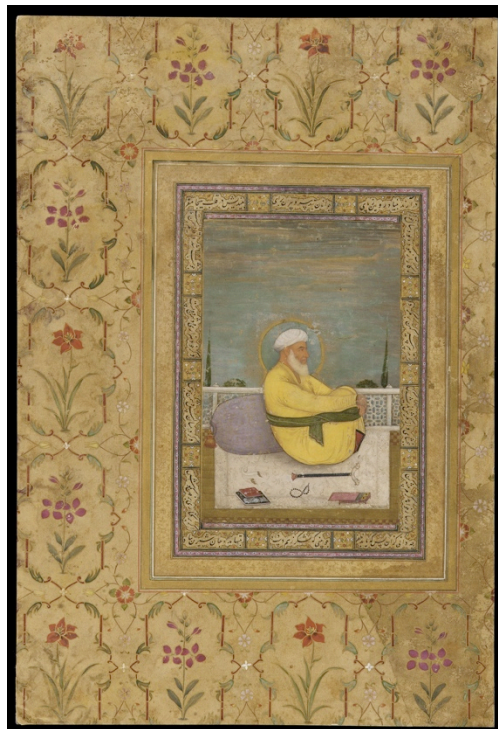


**Figure 4.14:** Miyān Mīr and disciples (detail showing Shāh Dilrubā), circa 1638-40, Walters Art Museum, Baltimore (W.696)





**Figure 4.15:** Dārā Shikoh in a lesson, *Dārā Shikoh Album* (detail), circa 1630-34, British Library, London (Add Or 3129 f.18)



**Figure 4.16:** Mullā Shāh, circa 1655, Art History Trust Loan, Freer|Sackler, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C. (LTS 2002.2.4)



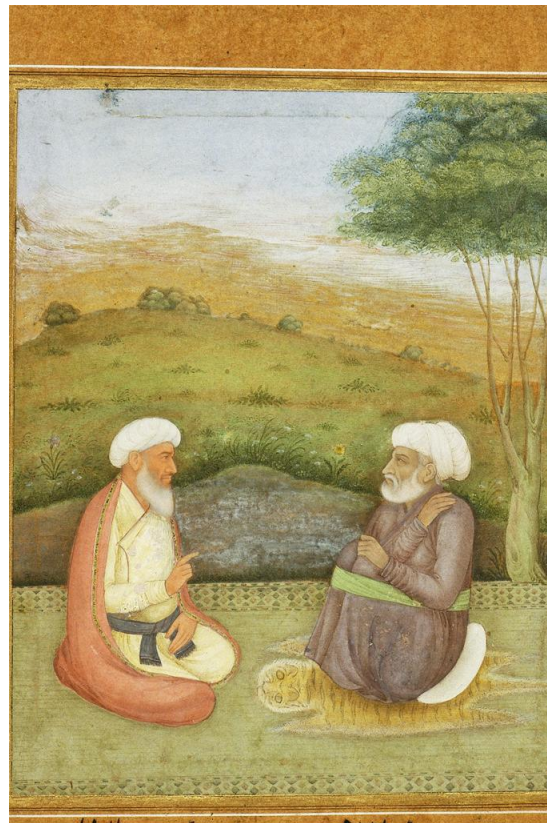


**Figure 4.17:** Painting commemorating Dārā Shikoh's initiation, attributed to La'ichand  
 Circa, 1640, Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.  
 (S1986.432)





**Figure 4.18:** Painting commemorating Dārā Shikoh's initiation (detail), attributed to La'ichand Circa, 1640, Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C. (S1986.432)



**Figure 4.19:** Mullā Shāh with Miyān Mīr, circa 1655-1658, Bharat Kalā Bhavan, Varanasi (BKB 717)



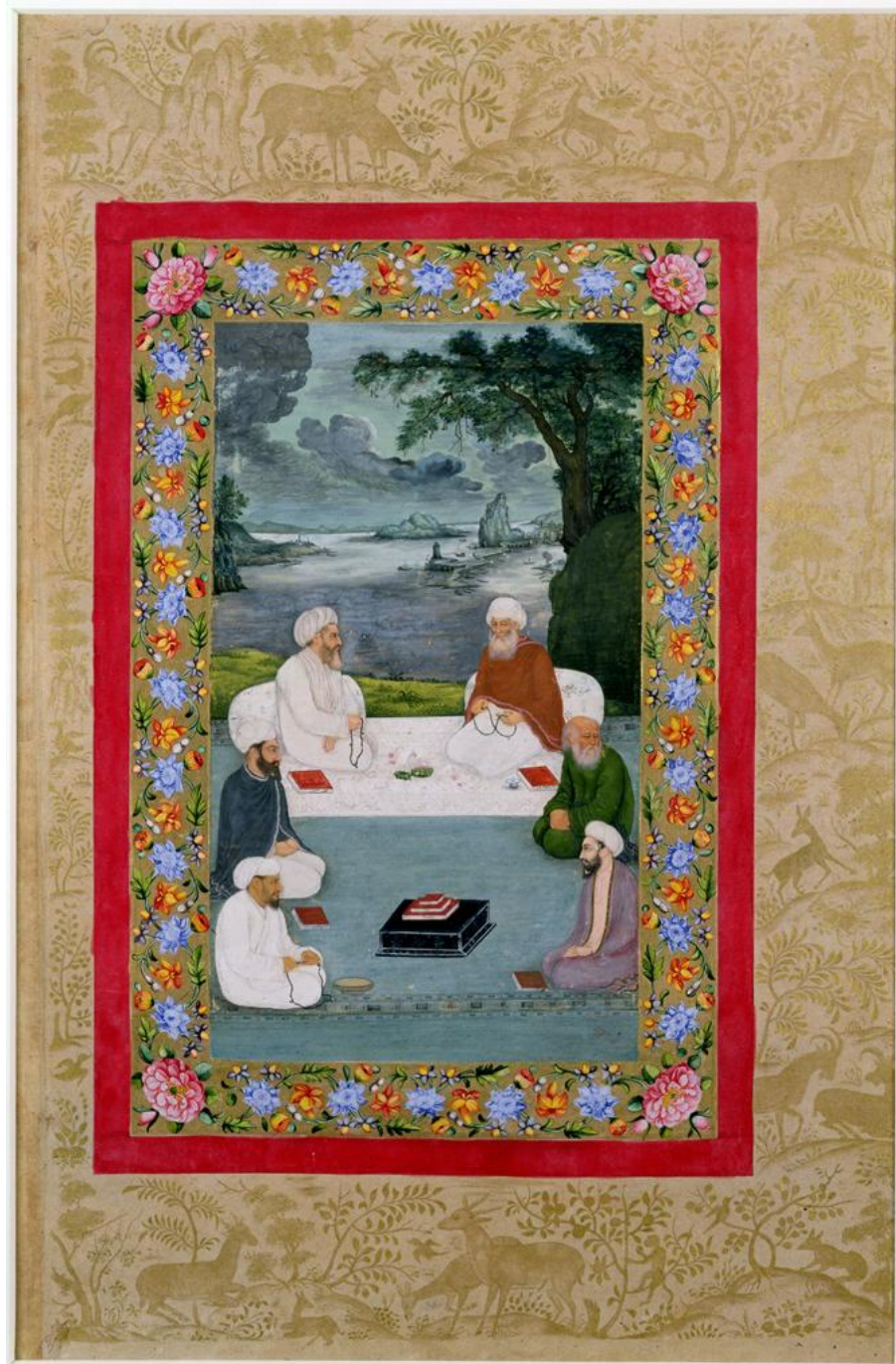
**Figure 4.20:** Miyān Mīr, Mullā Shāh and Dārā Shikoh, ascribed to Chitarman, circa 1655-58, Victoria and Albert Museum, London (IM.250-1921)



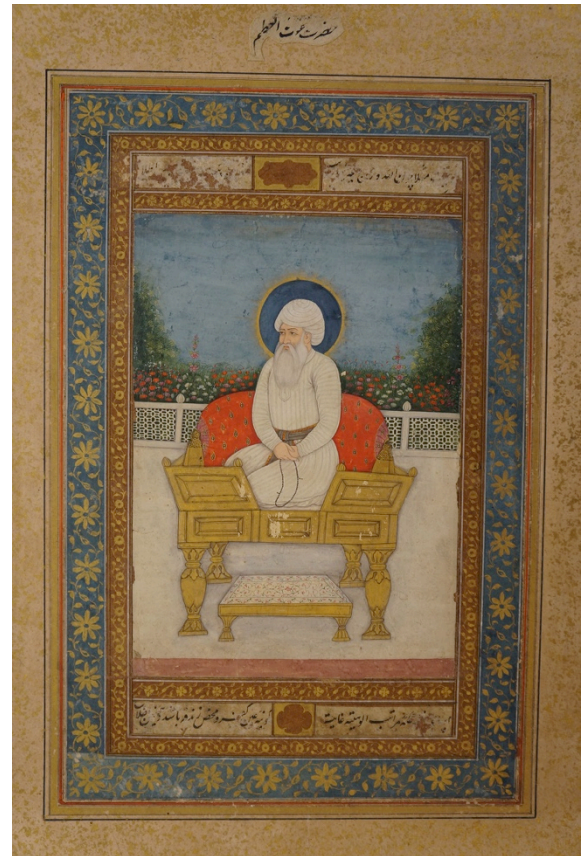
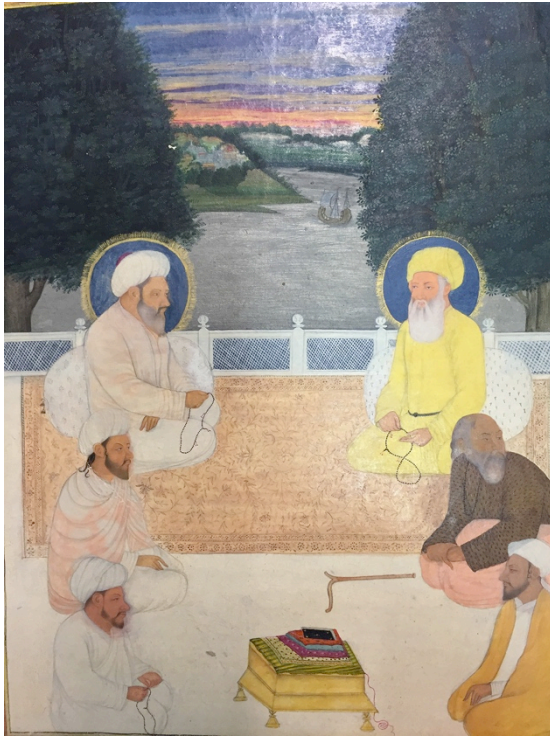


**Figure 4.21:** Shaykh Ḥusayn Chishtī, Khwāja Quṭb al-Dīn Bakhtiyār Kākī and disciples, ascribed to Bichitr, from the *Late Shāh Jahān Album*, circa 1645, San Diego Museum of Arts (1990.353)





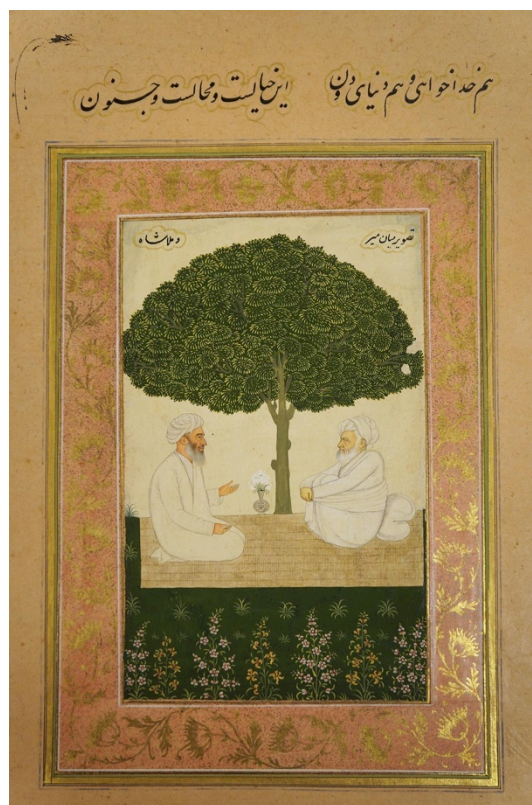
**Figure 4.22:** (counter clockwise from the top-right) ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, Mu’īn al-Dīn Chishtī, Quṭb al-Dīn Bakhtiyār Kākī, Bābā Farīd, Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā’, and Shāh Sharaf Bū ‘Alī Qalandar, from the *St. Petersburg Muraqqa’*, circa 1650 (with 18<sup>th</sup> century additions in Isfahan), Academy of Sciences, Institute of Oriental Studies, Saint Petersburg, (MS. E-14, fol. 48r)



**Figure 4.23** (left): (counter clockwise from the top-right) ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, Mu’īn al-Dīn Chishtī, Quṭb al-Dīn Bakhtiyār Kākī, Bābā Farīd, Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā’, and Shāh Sharaf Bū ‘Alī Qalandar, circa 1710, British Library, London (Add Or 4473)

**Figure 4.24** (right): ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, circa 1710-30, Victoria and Albert Museum, London (IM.295-1914)





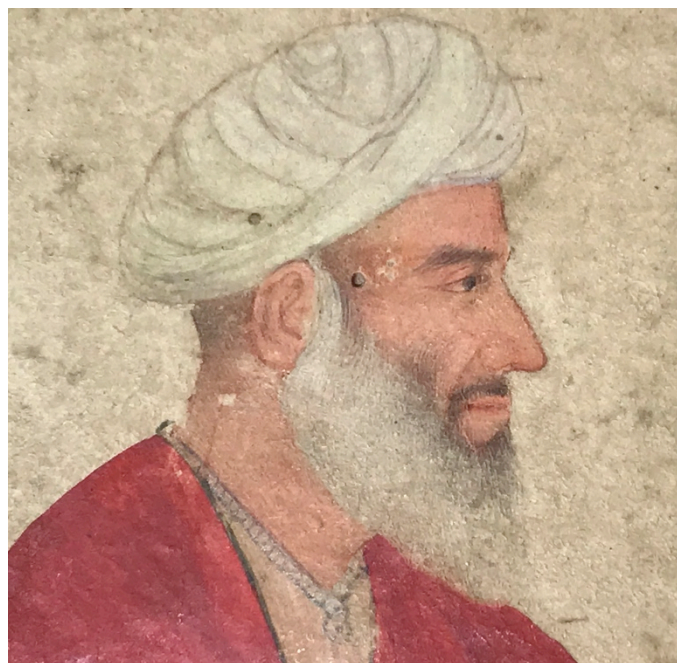
**Figure 4.25:** Mullā Shāh with Miyān Mīr, circa 1690-95, *Album of Suhrāb Khān Khānzād Bādshāh ‘Ālamgīr*, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (EA1990.1287)



**Figure 4.26:** Shrine of Mullā Shāh, Lahore, 2016



**Figure 4.27:** Mullā Shāh, circa 1639-40, Boston Museum of Fine Arts (14.664)



**Figure 4.28:** Mullā Shāh (detail), circa 1639-40, Boston Museum of Fine Arts (14.664)





**Figure 4.29:** Nobleman gazing at the portrait of his beloved, circa 1725, Victoria & Albert Museum (D-1171-1903)

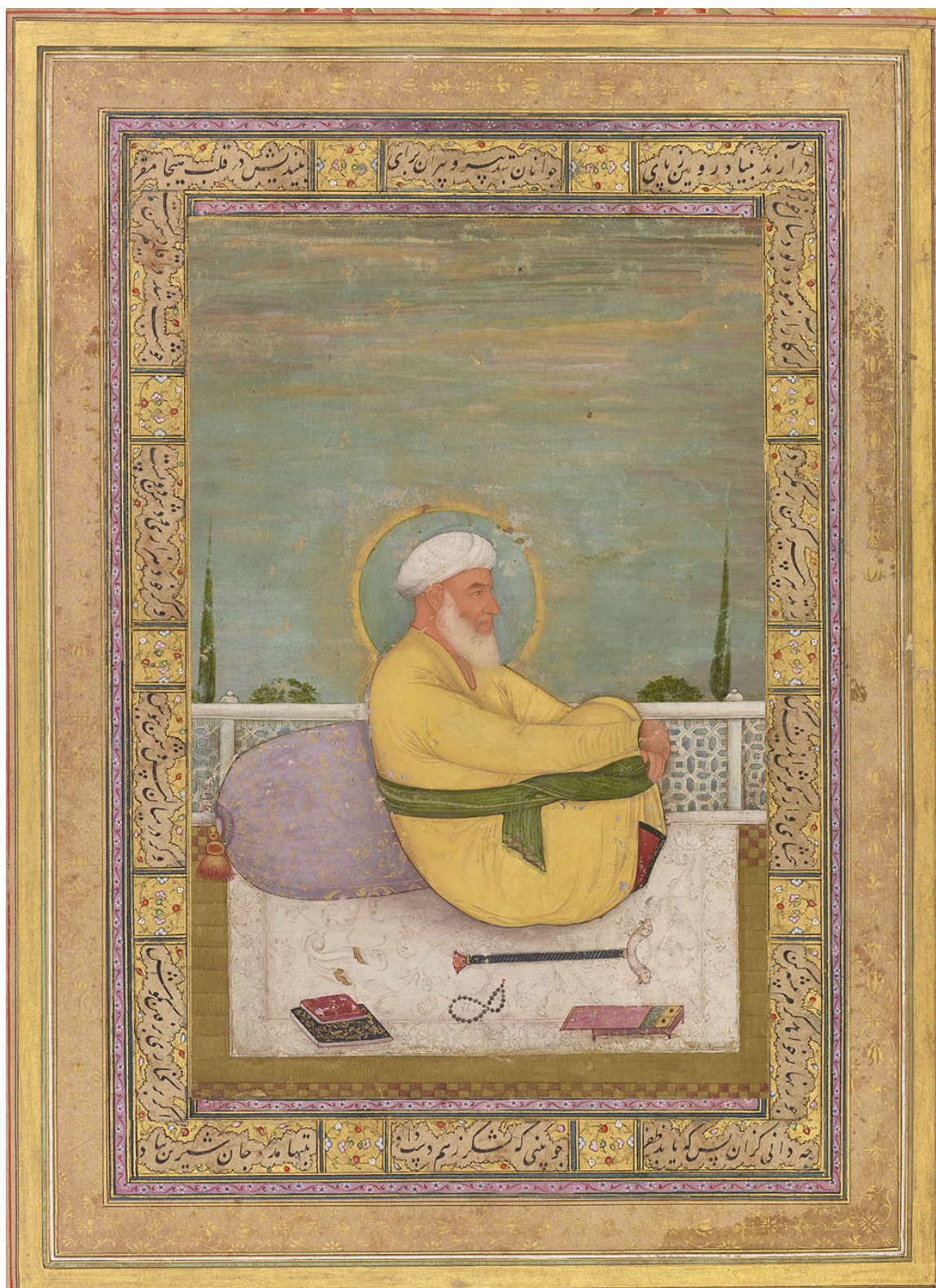




**Figure 4.30** (left): Mullā Shāh, circa, 1640-41, British Library, London (J.60.10)

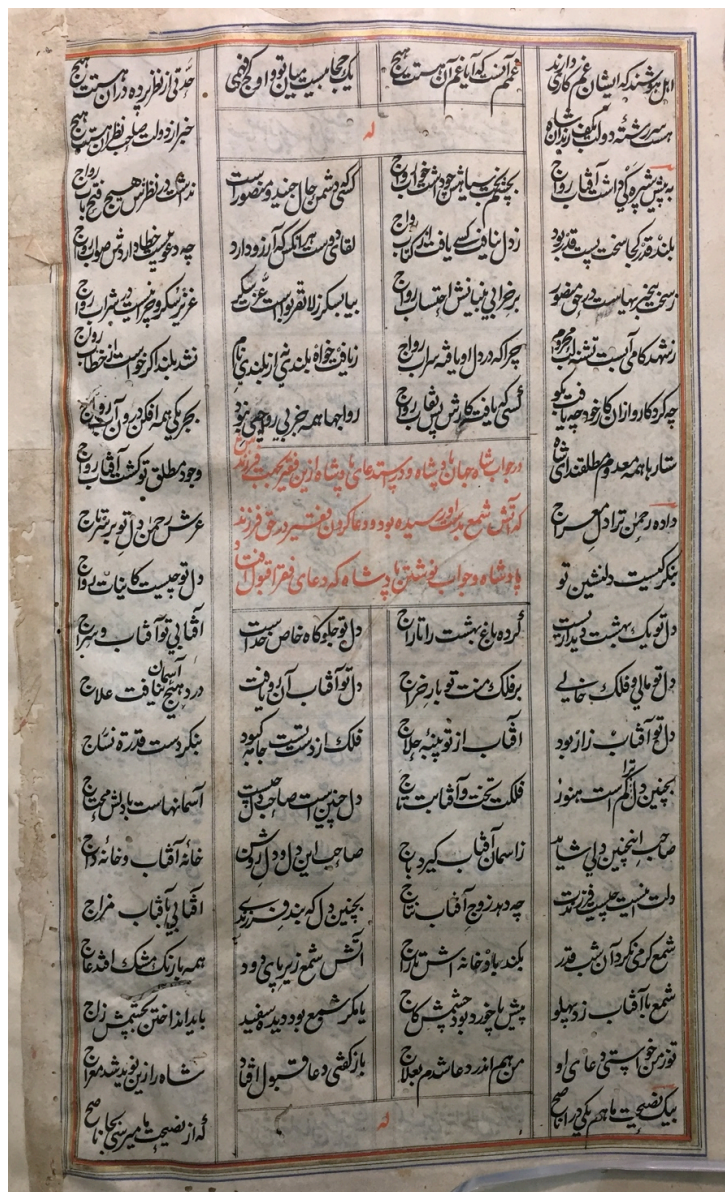


**Figure 4.31** (right): Mullā Shāh (detail), circa 1640-41, British Library, London (J.60.10)



**Figure 4.32:** Mullā Shāh (detail), circa 1655, Art History Trust Loan, Freer|Sackler, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C. (LTS 2002.2.4)





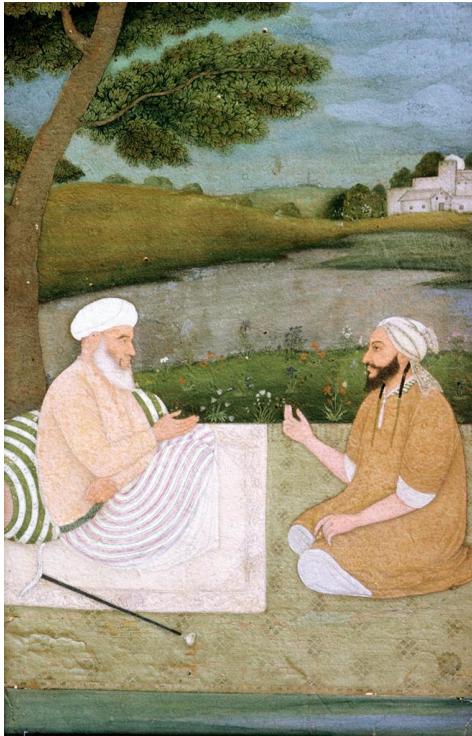
**Figure 4.33:** *Muṣannifāt-i Mullā Shāh*, British Library, London (MS Persian 1420, fol. 20b)



**Figure 4.34:** Mullā Shāh with an old man, a disciple and a deer, circa 1655-58, British Library, London (J7.6.2)

**Figure 4.35:** Mullā Shāh with an old man, a disciple and a deer (detail), circa 1655-58, British Library, London (J7.6.2)



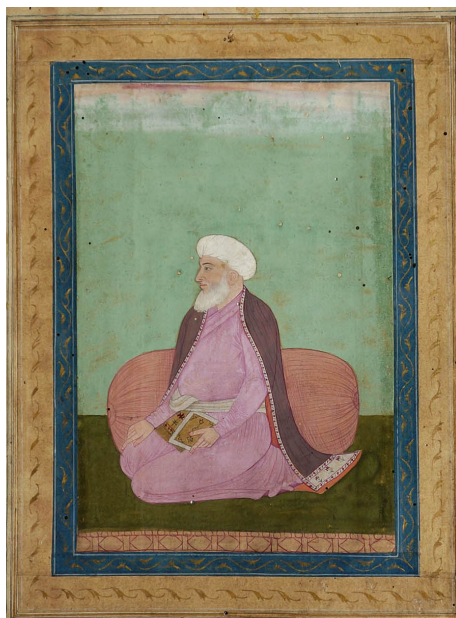


**Figure 4.36:** Mullā Shāh with a Śaiva ascetic in Kashmir, circa 1650-55, Bharat Kalā Bhavan, Varanasi (BKB 695)

**Figure 4.37:** Dārā Shikoh with a Śaiva ascetic in Kashmir, circa 1725, Boston Museum of Fine Arts (15.89)



**Figure 4.38:** Mullā Shāh with disciples in Kashmir, circa 1680, Large Clive Album, Victoria and Albert Museum, London (IS.133.85/B-1964)



**Figure 4.39:** Mullā Shāh, ascribed to Muḥammad Mūsā, 1699-1702, Kashmiri Album, Lahore Museum (1552)





**Figure 4.40:** Miyān Mīr and Mullā Shāh with disciples, attributed to Muḥammad Mūsā, circa 1695-1705, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (09.227.4)

**Figure 4.41:** Ḥaẓrat Quṭb al-Dīn and Ḥaẓrat Sulṭān al-Mashaykh, ascribed to Muḥammad Mūsā, 1699-1702, Kashmiri Album, Lahore Museum (1555)



**Figure 4.42:** Album preface, 1699-1702, Kashmiri Album, Lahore Museum (1552, verso)





**Figure C.1** (left): A gathering of mystics (detail), circa 1650, Victoria and Albert Museum (IS.94-1965)



**Figure C.2** (right): A gathering of mystics (detail), circa 1650, Victoria and Albert Museum (IS.94-1965)

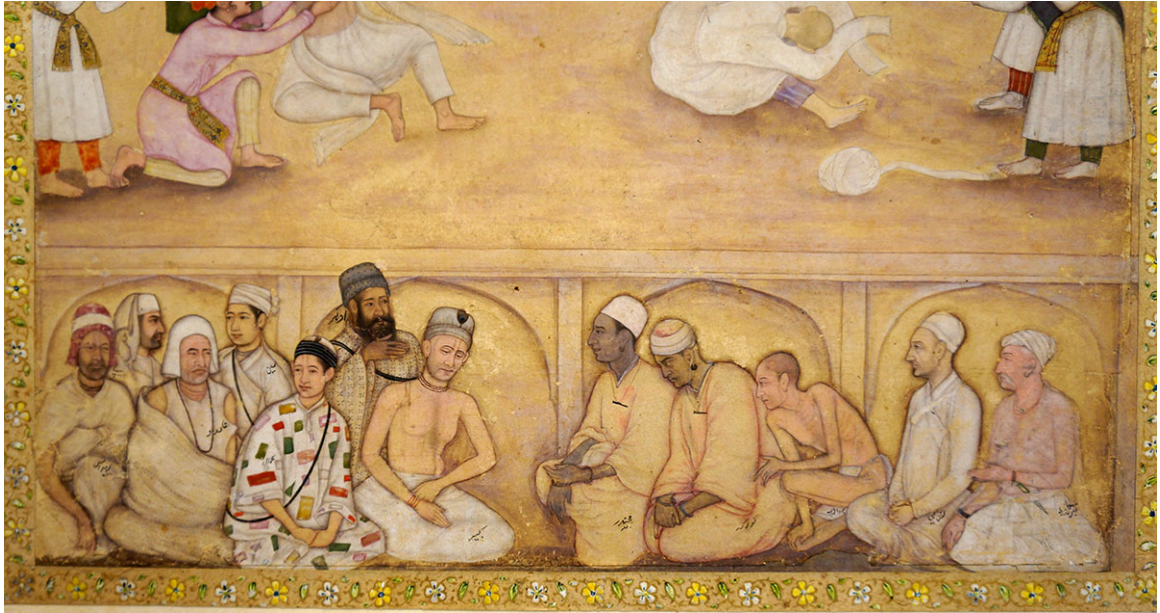


**Figure C.3:** A gathering of mystics (detail), circa 1650, Victoria and Albert Museum (IS.94-1965)



**Figure C.4:** Spiritual intoxication, circa 1750, from the *Clive Album*, Victoria and Albert Museum (IS.133.74/A-1964)





**Figure C.5:** A gathering of mystics (detail), circa 1650, Victoria and Albert Museum (IS.94-1965)



**Figure C.6:** The base of the Taj Mahal, Agra

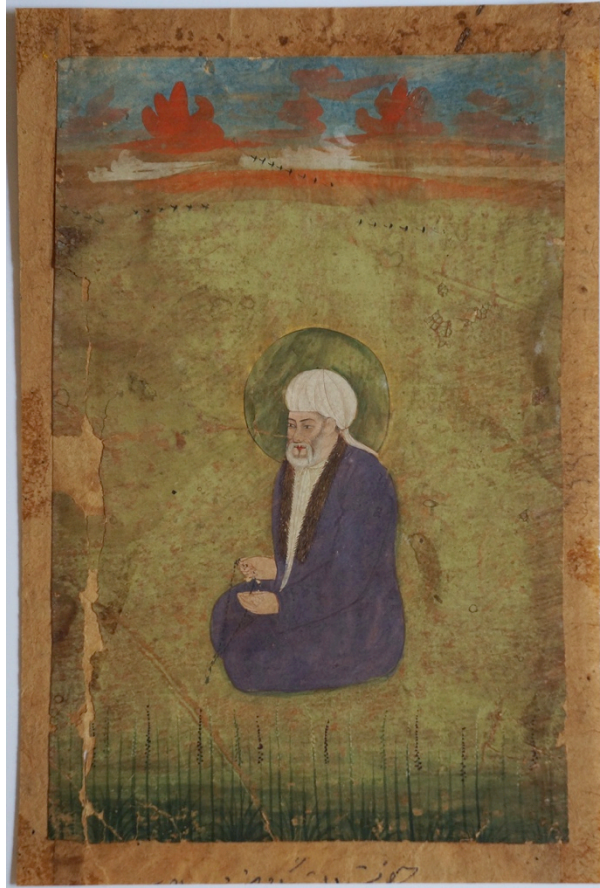




**Figure C.7:** Kamā Dās, circa 1740, Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution (F.1936.14)

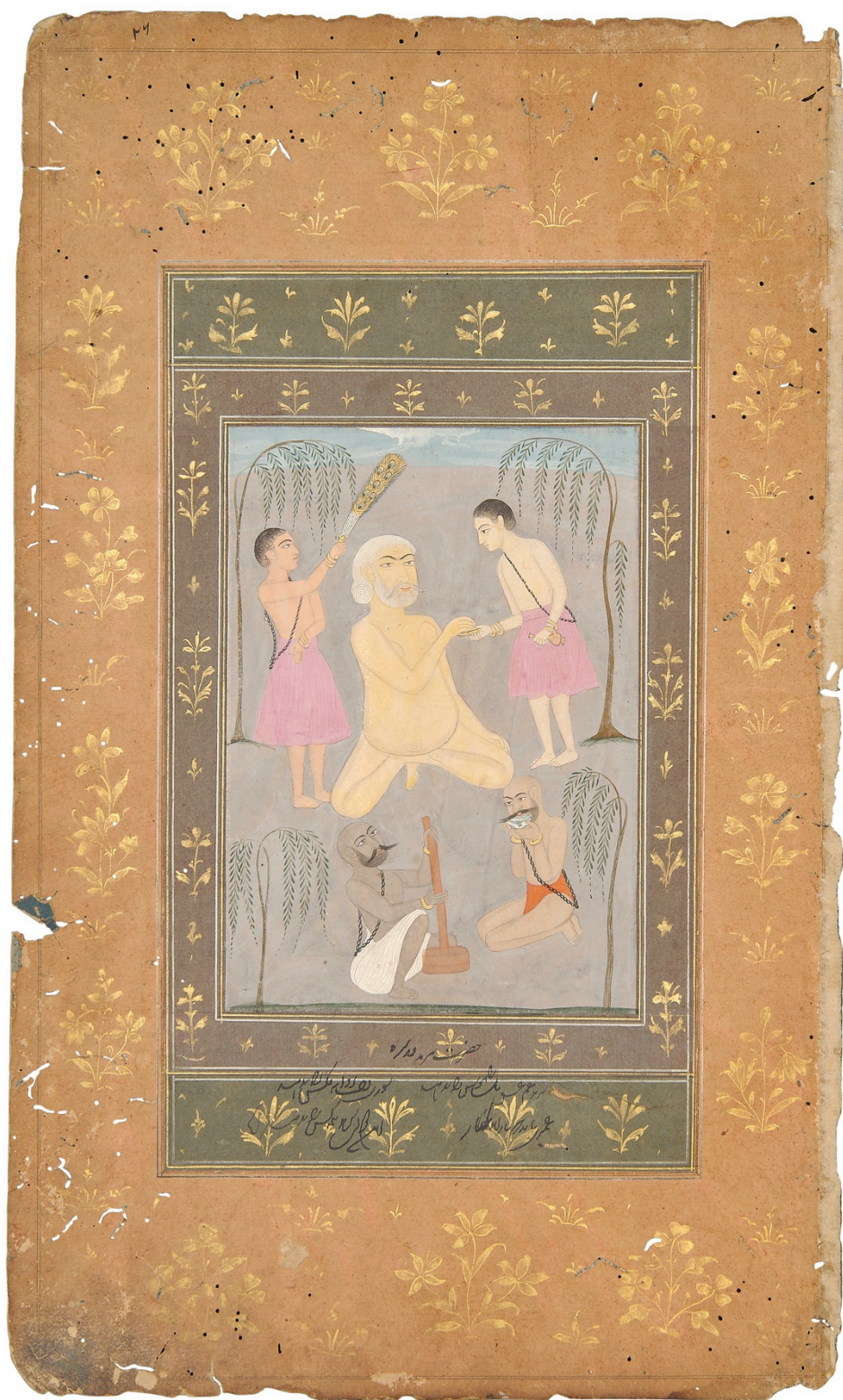


**Figure C.8** (left): Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā', from the Lahore drawing series of saints, circa 1780-1800, Lahore Museum (F-11)



**Figure C.9** (right): Mu'īn al-Dīn, circa 1750-1800, Lahore Museum (1619)





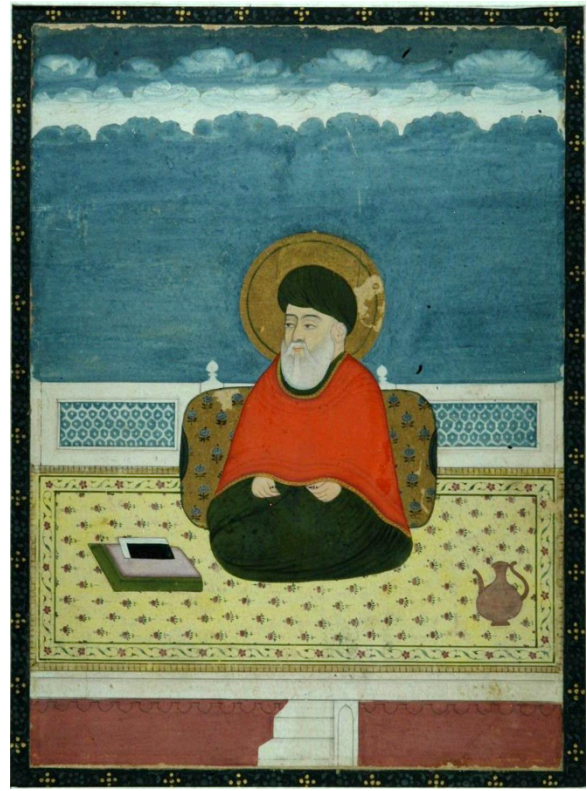
**Figure C.10:** Sarmad with his Qalandaṛī disciples drinking *bhang*, by the workshop of Muḥammad Mūsā, Kashmir, circa 1700, Christie's (Sale 12282, Lot 518)





**Figure C.11:** Kabīr with Ravīdās, Sen, Aughur, Nāmdev, Kamāl, Matsyendranāth and Gorakhnāth, by Mīr Kalān Khān, circa 1740, Metropolitan Museum of Art (2009.318)





**Figure C.12** (left): Guru Amar Dās, circa 1850, Museum Rietberg (Inv.-Nr. RVI 1396)

**Figure C.13** (right): An unidentified sufi saint, circa 1850, Lahore Museum, Faqir Khana Collection (D-23)



**Figure C.14:** A *majlis* poster, late-20<sup>th</sup> century, Pakistan





**Figure C.15:** Female ascetics in patched robes, circa 1750, Ashmolean Museum (EA1961.59)

## Appendix I

### Portraits of Mulla Shah

*Note:* The following is a list of all drawings and paintings that have portraits of Mullā Shāh known to the author at the time the dissertation was submitted. These include drawings (*siāh qalam*), paintings (*gad rang*) and tinted drawings (*nīm qalam*). The works are grouped chronologically. Entries will follow the formatting below:

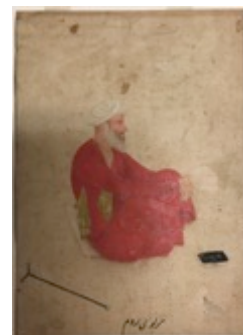
No.    Subject/Title  
          Artist (if known)  
          Date  
          Album/Series (if known)  
          Collection/Repository (Accession Number)

In some cases the author has assigned new dates after careful consideration of stylistic, formal and inscriptional elements.

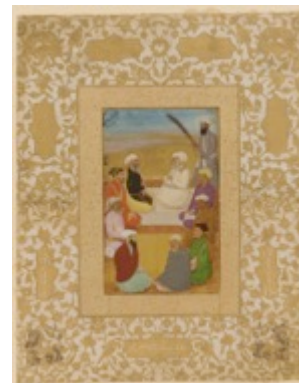
1. Miyān Mīr and his close disciples  
    Circa 1638-40  
    Walters Museum of Art, Baltimore (W.696)



2. Mullā Shāh  
    Circa, 1639-40  
    Boston Museum of Fine Arts (14.664)



3. Painting commemorating Dārā Shikoh's initiation  
    Attributed to La'lchand  
    Circa, 1640  
    Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian  
    Institution, Washington D.C. (S1986.432)



4. Painting commemorating Dārā Shikoh's initiation  
 Circa, 1640 (with possible 19<sup>th</sup> century additions)  
 Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh Album  
 Gulistan Palace Library, Tehran  
 (Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh Album, fol. 14)



5. Mullā Shāh  
 Circa, 1640-41  
 Johnson Album  
 British Library, London (J.60.10)



6. Mullā Shāh  
 Circa 1640-45  
 Mughal Album of 59 folios reassembled in Lucknow  
 Royal Collection Trust, Windsor Castle (1005038.bb)



7. (clockwise from top-right), sacred gathering  
 with Miyān Mīr, Mullā Khwāja, Mullā Shāh,  
 Shāh Khiyālī, Abu'l Mu'ālī, and an  
 unidentified sufi  
*St. Petersburg Muraqqa'*  
 Academy of Sciences, Institute of Oriental Studies,  
 St. Petersburg (MS. E-14, fol. 49r)

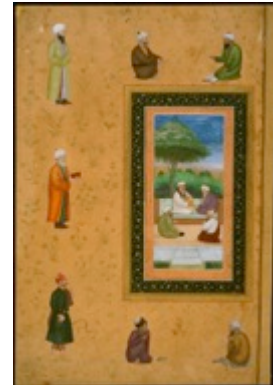




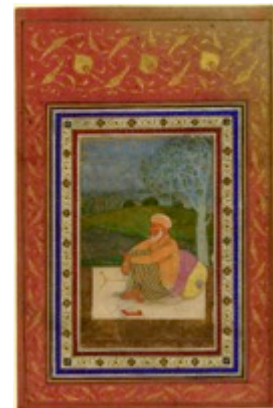
8. Mullā Shāh with Miyān Mīr  
 Circa 1640-45  
 Yale Art Gallery, New Haven (2001.138.59)



9. Mullā Shāh preaching to his disciples  
 Circa 1646  
 Late Shāh Jahān Album  
 Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (07B.39)



10. Mullā Shāh in Kashmir  
 Circa 1645-50  
 British Museum, London (1949,0212,0.5)



11. Mullā Shāh with a Śaiva ascetic in Kashmir  
 Circa 1650-55  
 Bharat Kalā Bhavan, Varanasi (BKB 695)



12. A gathering of Indic mystics  
 Circa 1652-54  
 Victoria and Albert Museum, London (IS.94-1965)



13. Mullā Shāh  
 Circa 1655  
 Art History Trust Loan, Freer|Sackler,  
 Smithsonian Institution,  
 Washington D.C. (LTS 2002.2.4)



14. Mullā Shāh with Miyān Mīr  
 Circa 1655-1658  
 Bharat Kalā Bhavan, Varanasi (BKB 717)

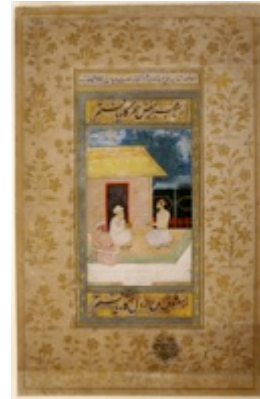


15. Miyān Mīr with Shaykh Ḥusayn, Mullā Shāh,  
 Abu'l Mu'ālī and two other ascetics  
 Ascribed to L'alchand  
 Circa 1655-58  
 Ardeshir Album  
 Christies (Sale 6537, Lot.0016)





16. Miyān Mīr, Mullā Shāh and Dārā Shikoh  
 Ascribed to Chitarman  
 Circa 1655-58  
 Victoria and Albert Museum, London (IM.250-1921)



17. Mullā Shāh with an old man, a disciple and a deer  
 Circa 1655-58  
 Johnson Album  
 British Library, London (J7.6.2)



18. Dārā Shikoh with Miyān Mīr, Mullā Shāh  
 and Mullā Khwāja Kalān  
 Circa 1655-60  
 Johnson Album  
 British Library, London (J.4.3)



19. Dārā Shikoh in lesson with Mullā Shāh  
 Circa 1660-80  
 Persian manuscript of the Futuḥ of ibn Asam,  
 dated 1621  
 Bibliothèque nationale de France,  
 Paris (Persan 98, f. 355)



20. Mullā Shāh with disciples in Kashmir  
 Circa 1680  
 Large Clive Album  
 Victoria and Albert Museum,  
 London (IS.133.85/B-1964)



21. Mullā Shāh with Miyān Mīr  
 Circa 1690-95  
 Album of Suhrāb Khān Khānzād Bādshāh ‘Ālamgīr  
 Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (EA1990.1287)



22. Miyān Mīr and Mullā Shāh with disciples  
 Attributed to Muḥammad Mūsā  
 Circa 1695-1705  
 Metropolitan Museum of Art,  
 New York (09.227.4)



23. Mullā Shāh  
 Ascribed to Muḥammad Mūsā  
 1699-1702  
 Kashmiri Album  
 Lahore Museum (1552)



24. Mullā Shāh with Miyān Mīr  
 Circa 1720-40  
 Morgan Library, New York (M.849.1)



25. A sacred gathering of Qādirī and Chishtī saints  
 Circa 1760-80  
 San Diego Museum of Art (1990.375)



26. Miyān Mīr presenting a book to Mullā Shāh  
 Attributed to Bahādur Singh  
 Circa 1775-80  
 Johnson Album  
 British Library, London (J.1.19)



27. Mullā Shāh with Miyān Mīr  
 By Miskīn Muḥammad  
 Circa 1780-82  
 Mathnawīyyāt-i Mullā Shāh  
 British Library, London (IO Islamic 578)



28. Mullā Shāh  
 Circa 1780-1800  
 Lahore Museum (A-762)



29. A sacred gathering of Qādirī and Chishtī saints  
 Circa 1800-1820  
 Edinburgh University Library (Tasawir, f.15v)



## APPENDIX II

### Selections from Jahānārā Begum's *Risāla-i ṣāhibiyya*

*Note: I have translated it from the Persian original using Dr. Muhammad Aslam's edited version.*<sup>388</sup>

#### Introduction (78-79):

Unlimited praise and gratitude to God whose very substance is One and Absolute, and in Whose presence there is no room for likeness or parallel. Unlimited prayers and peace descend on His friend and beloved, who is the Messenger of Truth – in whose clear creed there is no path of corruption – and upon his venerated family and generous companions, each one of whom is a monotheist in the court of Oneness, a strengthener and agent of the Muḥammadan creed. They do nothing except for follow their leader.

This treatise, written by this weak *faqīra*<sup>389</sup>--this feeble wretch; this servant of the friends of God; believer in the *fuqarā* of the gate of God—Jahānārā, daughter of Emperor Shāh Jahān, may God forgive his transgressions and cover over his faults, is a summary of the life and events of His Highness—the guardianship and refuge; the instrument of guidance; the leader of the gnostics of the epoch; the pride of the pursuers of certainty in this age; aware of the symbols of Divine Mystery; the world-renowned Shaykh; commander of the troops of Oneness; the God-appointed role model of the highest *awliyā*’; the perfected and complete guide—Maulānā Shāh, God’s Peace on him, who is

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388 Jahānārā Begum, “*Risāla-i ṣāhibiyya*,” ed. Aslam, Dr. Muhammad in *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan*, XVI, 4 (1979): 77-110.

389 *Faqīr* literally refers to someone who is abject, or poverty stricken, but is also a common term to address an ascetic, or sufi. *Fuqarā* is the plural of *faqīr*.



the guide and instructor of this weak one. I have also included an account of my own troubles, of how I became his disciple; how I arrived at tasting the desire to know him; and how I followed him with the hope of finding the Way. I have explained all these events in this book called the *Risāla-i ṣāhibiyya*.

Although the pen with a broken nib is incapable of expressing the exalted qualities and exceptional attributes of his Highness even in a hundred years, and this stunted expression is unable to articulate even a few of the many beautiful qualities and choice distinctions of the Perfected Guide, however, I have embarked on writing about the flawless states of his Highness, may God grant him Peace, in order to receive the happiness of both worlds. And the real reason for writing about my own life is that I wish that the name of this weak sinner should be remembered and mentioned after the exalted name of his Excellency, and that by the grace of his name God the most Generous Absolute may forgive this *faqīra* who has wasted away her lowly life, thereby raising her in the ranks of his devotees and followers. Furthermore, I have read some autobiographies of previous shaykhs who wrote about their own life events, and so I am also following in their footsteps. Otherwise, who am I, with small capital, to draw out even a drop from the ocean of miracles and well-pleasing qualities of his Excellency, or to pick even a single flower from the rose garden of pleasing virtues of that True Guide? And what rank do I figure in that I should write about my own concerns. It is my hope that the account that flows from the tip of the pen is accurate, and is neither an exaggeration nor an understatement. And God is the triumphant exalted of all, and the trustworthy.

*Note: After the introduction starts a lengthy account of Mullā Shāh's life and spiritual practice, followed by Jahānārā's own quest for a sufi master. Eventually, after much searching, with the help of her brother Dārā Shikoh, she sets her hopes on Mullā Shāh.*

### **Initiation Passage (pages 101-103):**

And in my audacity, in a few days I sent two or three letters for Ḥaẓrat's pleasure, written with total sincerity and belief. And I included this couplet:

If it was possible for me to attain that Sun-like face  
What is kingship, I would claim godhood!<sup>390</sup>

Since sending offerings was against proper decency, the first time, I sent spinach and *nān* cooked with my own hands along with a letter, which my eunuch delivered. Initially, Ḥaẓrat did not reply for almost a month, and according to the level of his disinterestedness he exercised a lot of disdain. But he would read my letters and would say, "what have we to do with the worldly and the kingly?" However, I continued to dispatch letters. And whenever my brother, who knows the Path of Union, would attend to him, he would profusely express my sincerity and faith to him. After that, through his own insight, he found this humble servant's quest and neediness to be genuine. Realizing that my real search is none other than the search for the True Path, he gradually began to respond to my letters. Thus, the taste for the perfume of hope that I harbored of being guided by him entered my soul. Once this wretch had become aware of Ḥaẓrat's excellent

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390 Jahānārā Begum, *Ṣāhibiyya*, 101. This is a couplet attributed to Abu Bakr Shiblī, a ninth-century sufi from Baghdad in the line of Junayd al-Baghdādī. He is also quoted by Dara Shikoh in *Ḥasanāt al-ʿarīfīn*, 23.

rank and elevated station through her brother, the knower of Reality, there was no doubt left in the heart.

She desired to outwardly witness his Blessed Grace, and in accordance to this immeasurable desire, this worthless one's father invited him. Ḥaẓrat—responding to the Quranic verse *Obey Allah, and obey the messenger and those of you who are in authority*<sup>391</sup>, and by the theme of the *Ḥadith* that one should *answer every invitation*—came to the house. I saw him from a separate place [through a veil]. Beams of light were emanating from his enlightened forehead, and my Truth-witnessing eyes and devoted intelligence were awestruck. My belief in him grew a thousand times stronger than before. The conditions I had set for myself—that I would not follow a guide I hadn't seen with my own eyes or someone who didn't have my brother's endorsement—vanished. Through my brother's intercession I, with my own humble hands, joyfully held on to Ḥaẓrat's mantle, and made him my true guide in the world and religion. He showed great favor and kindness—something that a true guide shows to his true disciples—and gave me the method and practice of the Qādirī order, which my auspicious brother instructed me in.

Even before I could witness the perfection of my revered guide with my own eyes, my brother had given me Ḥaẓrat's blessed *shabīh* (portrait), painted on paper by his [Dārā Shikoh's] *muṣavvir* (painter). And I would gaze at his revered portrait all the time with a pure and faithful viewing. And during certain prescribed times I would contemplate on the image of Ḥaẓrat's blessed face. And on the first day [of my initiation], my learned brother according to the method of Our Guide which is the way of

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391 Qur'ān, *Chapter of the Women*, verse 59.

the noble Qādirī order, engaged me in the technique of *tavajjuh* (concentrating) on the face of the Guide and *taṣavvur* (visualizing) of the faces of the Prophet and the four honorable friends [the first four caliphs] and the other *awliyā' Allah* (friends of God).<sup>392</sup>

The next day I made my ablution, put on purified clothes and kept a fast. At dinnertime I broke my fast with quinces sent to me by Our Guide. Later, a dinner, which was not simple by any means, came from Mullā Muḥammad Sa'īd, one of the most perfect gnostics among Ḥaẓrat's disciples. Ḥaẓrat himself often eats at Muḥammad Sa'īd's house, and I too ate just a little from the food. Then I sat until midnight in the mosque that I have in my quarters. After performing the pre-dawn prayers I came to my room and sat in a corner, facing the *qiblā* (the direction of the *Ka'ba*), and concentrated my mind on the picture of the master, whilst at the same time visualizing the company of our holy Prophet, his companions and the friends of God, may God be pleased with them all.

This thought crossed my mind: since I am a follower of the Chishtīyya order and now am come to the Qādirīyya, will I receive any spiritual openings or not?<sup>393</sup> And will I benefit from the guidance and instruction of Ḥaẓrat-i Shāhī? While lost in this thought I entered a state in which I was neither asleep nor awake. I saw the Holy Prophet seated with his companions and the great saints in a sacred gathering. Ḥaẓrat-i Akhund (a title for Mullā Shāh) who was also present sitting close to the Prophet, had placed his head on his Grace's blessed feet. And the Prophet, Peace be upon him, spoke, saying, "O Mullā Shāh! You have lit the Timurid lamp."<sup>394</sup> At that moment I returned from that state,

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392 As discussed in Chapter Two, here we have a clear distinction between meditating on an image of the Guide and visualizing the faces of the Friends.

393 This suggests that she was informally part of the Chishtīyya order to gain blessings without having initiation, as many people in the subcontinent are to this day.

394 "Timurid" refers to the royal lineage of the house of Emperor Timūr, which was carried forward by the Mughal rulers in India

joyous and ecstatic, and thanked the Lord with many prostrations. And I had a quatrain with the following theme on my tongue:

Shāh! You are he who, through the purity  
of the blessing of your *naẓar*, brings seekers to God

Everyone that you glance upon arrives at their desired destination,  
The light of your *naẓar* is but the Light of God



### APPENDIX III

#### Translation of the First Eighteen Couplets of Mullā Shāh Badakhshī's Mathnavī, *Risāla-i shāhiyya*<sup>395</sup>

*Note: I have made the translation using the British Library manuscript, IO Islamic 578. The annotations are included as footnotes.*

1. *Aī tū shāh-i jahān-o tū dārā*  
*Veī tū dārā-o tū jahān ārā*

O You, Shah-i-Jahān (King of the world), You its Dārā (possessor)<sup>396</sup>  
O You the possessor and You Jahānārā (the world-adorners)

2. *Be tū shāh-i jahānī-ī qāyīm*  
*Be tū dārā-i ye jahān dāyīm*<sup>397</sup>

Through You, the kingship of the world is established  
Through You the possession of the world is made everlasting

3. *Hama shāh jahāniyat dārā*  
*Tū-o dārā-i ye har jahān ārā*

You possess all kings (kingship)

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395 The meter of the mathnavī is the popular *khafīf sālim makhbūn*.

The *Risāla* is part of a manuscript from the British Library (IO Islamic 578). It is a compilation of treatises of Mullā Shāh written in *mathnavī* form, under the title, *Mathnavīyyāt-i mullā shāh*. The 116 page *Risāla-i shāhiyya* ends with the all-important colophon that not only includes the date of completion but also includes Mullā Shāh's own signature. The date is given by this chronogram: *guftam tārikh-i sāl-i ū "khatmiyah,"* which equals 1055 AH/1645 CE. The tiny, spidery hand next to the colophon is the saint's own hand, in which he has written in Persian, "All corrections have been made from the hands of the author, who is me, Mullā Shāh." Throughout the manuscript this distinct hand can be seen in the margins, making corrections or elaborations to the main text.

From the author's own signature, and from the frontispiece illumination which is done in a typically Kashmiri style, it can be concluded that the manuscript was Mullā Shāh's own personal copy (fig. 1). Art historical evidence shows that a copy was also possibly made for the imperial Mughal library.

The fact that the treatise, in addition to featuring in one of the most opulent albums of the Shāh Jahān period, also includes the names of the three patrons of the album – Dārā Shikōh, Jahanārā Begum and Shāh Jahān – suggests that it was presented to the court.

396 *Dārā*, in addition to an obvious reference to the heir apparent Dārā Shikōh, could also be an allusion to the Persian king Darius, as the archetypal king.

397 Throughout the mathnavī, and in fact throughout Mullā Shāh's oeuvre, there are words and ideas that get repeated, as if to prize as many meanings out of a word as possible. In this case "kingship" and "possession" are attributes that both God and the terrestrial ruler are endowed with, and initially it is not clear which of the two is being addressed. After the third couplet it becomes clearer that Mullā Shāh opens his poem with a praise of God, the King, and then moves down to address Shāh Jahān, the terrestrial ruler. However, "Shāh" simultaneously refers to Mullā Shāh himself, and should also be read as that.

You are the possessor of every world-adorner

4. *Tū-o shāh jahānī īn shah rā*  
*Tū dil ārāī īn dil āgah rā*

You are the Kingship of this king  
 You are the heart-adorning of this enlightened heart<sup>398</sup>

5. *'Aql rā az tū pīsh-i pā dīdan*  
*Varna raftī be rāh laghzīdan*

Reason from You acquired foresight  
 Otherwise you went on the stumbling path<sup>399</sup>

6. *Pīsh-i pā khurdanash ghazā bāshad*  
*Pusht pā khurdan ishtiha bāshad*

Intimacy with Him should give [you] subsistence  
 Following His footsteps, [you] should [always] be desiring [of Him]

7. *Chashmash az chashm-i tust bīnad rā*  
*Yakdilī tā ze haq shavad āgāh*

his eyes see the path from Your eyes  
 So that, in a heart-uniting way, he becomes aware of the Truth<sup>400</sup>

8. *Varnah chashm tuhī ze bīnā īst*  
*Keh pur az rūy-i nāshanāsā īst*

Otherwise the eye is devoid of seeing<sup>401</sup>

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398 "This" most directly refers to the worldly king who is understood to be the shadow of God, the real Shāh. In this way the *risāla* acts as a very deliberate and cautious reminder and advice to the king and his role in the world as the representative of God on earth. Secondly, it also refers to himself, Mullā Shāh.

399 From the fifth couplet to the second chapter of the treatise, on page four, the poet introduces a device in which meaning hinges around the word "*varnah*", "otherwise." In summary, if you (Mullā Shāh/Emperor Shāh Jahān/the reader) are not aligned and subsumed with the will of God, you are lost in your own individuality, and suffer ignominy.

400 This theme which repeats in the following verses, of seeing, hearing and walking through God's own faculties references the *Hadīth Qudsi*, in which God speaks on the tongue of the Prophet: "He who is hostile to a friend of Mine I declare war against him. My slave approaches Me with nothing more beloved to Me than what I have made obligatory upon him, and My slave keeps drawing nearer to Me with voluntary works until I love him. And when I love him, I am his hearing with which he hears, his sight with which he sees, his hand with which he seizes, and his foot with which he walks. If he asks me, I will surely give to him, and if he seeks refuge in Me, I will surely protect him" (Fath al-Bari, 11.34041, hadith 6502) In a certain sense the first section of the treatise is an explication of this *Hadīth*.

And is [like] a face full of obscurity

9. *Dastash az dast-i tust girāmī*  
*Varna mushtīst sōkhta rag-o pey*

Through His hands your hand is made precious<sup>402</sup>  
 Otherwise it is a handful of burnt up sinews and nerves

10. *Dast gīrīsh-i musht bījāīst*  
*Keh rasīdah be chashm-i bīnāīst*

Oppression by your hand is unfitting<sup>403</sup>  
 Because your eyes posses [God's] sight

11. *Pāyash az pāy-i tust rah past ast*  
*Varnah pāyī 'aṣāy-i bīrāst ast*

Because His foot is your foot, the path is smooth,  
 Otherwise your foot is a crooked support<sup>404</sup>

12. *Past raftan ze rāh-i raftan-i ūst*  
*Chīst chashmat ze chashm agar parmūst*

To walk humbly on His path is the way<sup>405</sup>  
 What is your eye if not a hopeful eye?

13. *Dil-i ū bī tū yak dil-i murdah*  
*Keh dil-i kūr az ūst afzurdah*

his heart without You is a dead heart  
 The blind heart is depressed because of [His absence]

14. *Har khiyālīsh yak 'aṣāb-i gūr*<sup>406</sup>

401 The Persian *chashm* is the same as the Arabic *'ayn*, in that it means both eye and fount. It is a favorite metaphor in sufi poetry, and usually means the eye of the heart, since the heart is the only faculty where God's presence can reside.

402 This is a continuation of the aforementioned *Ḥadīth Qudsi*.

403 The subject, who is the Shāh, keeps oscillating between the second and third persons. For a more consistent translation and for the sake of readability I have chosen to translate "*Dast gīrīsh-i musht*" as "oppression by *your* hand" rather than "*his*" hands, which would be more literal, but more confusing.

404 "*Past*" is a word that has many meanings, and is used thus by the poet. In this context *past zamīn* or *past rah* means low-lying land.

405 In this context *past raftan* refers to go in a humble manner, literally, low.

406 Mullā Shāh wonderfully plays with the similarly written words *kūr* (blind) and *gūr* (grave). He compares the condition of the blind heart to the state of the damned soul in the grave.

*Munkar ast-o nakīr az ū benafūr*

his every thought is [then] a torment of the grave  
[even] Munkir and Nākir are disgusted by him<sup>407</sup>

15. *Sīnash az tū dil purī dārad*  
*Keh be dildārī dast bardārad*

From His chest you have an effulgent heart,  
Out of solace He takes your hand<sup>408</sup>

16. *Varnah rīsh dil ast ān sīnah*  
*Dil dar ān sīnah sang-o āīnah*

Otherwise that chest is a wounded heart,  
In that chest the heart is a stone and a mirror<sup>409</sup>

17. *Ze tū ū rāst pīsh dastī-i ‘ishq*  
*pīsh dastī ze tūst ū rā rizq*

From You he rightly begs for love,  
His sustenance is from begging to You

18. *Pīsh dastīyash varnah pasmānad*  
*‘Ishq ātish bejāan-i khas mānad*

It is his begging [to You], otherwise he tarries,  
The fire of love stays [away] from the kindling of the soul<sup>410</sup>

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407 *Munkir* and *Nākir* (literally the Denied and the Denier) are the two angels who test the faith of the dead in their graves. In this case, if the Shāh’s heart is without God’s guidance, then he is lost in the hellish labyrinth of his own mind.

408 *dast bardāshtan*: This compound verb was particularly difficult to translate in this context. It most typically means “to cease or stop doing something.” But it can also be used in its literal sense, of “lifting the hands.” In Book 8 of the *Bustān*, in the story of the poet and the Indian idolaters, Sa’dī concludes his advice thus: *beh dānam keh dastī ke bardāshtam/ beh nīrūy-i khud bar nīfrashtam*. “I know that the hand that I raise up/ is not from my own strength.” If we follow Sa’dī’s usage, then a literal translation here would be “out of solace He takes your hand.”

409 According to sufi thought the saint, or perfected man is one whose heart has become so polished so as to become a mirror that reflects God’s presence. The stone is something that breaks or scars the mirror. The wounded heart is thus imagined as a broken mirror.

410 If the Shāh (Everyman/King/Poet), who is here shown as the *sālik* (spiritual traveler), lags behind, he becomes distanced from the raging fire of Love. The entire goal of the sufi path is to be extinguished by the fire of God’s love, but if there is distance between the lover and beloved, then Mullā Shāh compares the soul of the traveler as damp brushwood that has not been touched by the fire.



Fig. 1: *Risāla-i-Shāhiyya*, folio 1, frontispiece.



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