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Emergence of Muslim endowments in connection with the Sufi shrines in India

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to trace the history of Muslim endowments in India during the medieval period. Sufi shrines played a crucial role in the emergence of Muslim endowments during the Sultanate and precisely in Mughal era. An attempt has been in this article to highlight the parts of various rulers in creating the institution of Muslim endowments through their constant attempts.

Keywords: Sufism, endowments, charity, dargah, Muslims, Mughals

Introduction

The sacred institution of *dargah* of Khwaja Muinuddin Hasan Chishti, has evolved as one of the most important charity institutions in the country, because of the large donations and gifts it used to receive from the large multitude of pilgrims for the purpose of its maintenance and service of the poor. The need to keep the *dargah* continuously as a place of prayer with the traditional rituals and customary practices, where the pilgrims get solace and peace they have been looking for, and the need to redistribute in different degrees and ways the large bulk of resources that the *dargah* receives as various forms of donations and gifts among the needy and the deserving, made inevitable the evolution of a meticulous administrative machinery for the *dargah*.

Very often the donations implied different intentions of the donor, who in turn tried to ensure that the priorities of intentions are well-safeguarded. Consequently, at times various rulers also interfered in the evolution and shaping of different categories of administrators for the *dargah*. Administration of the *dargah*, its prayer services and rituals went hand in hand with administration of charity works that are intrinsic to *dargah* institutions. Charity works have been central to Islam. The Quran mentions that, 'those who becomes righteous in their deeds, they get good reward permanently'. Similarly, if we consider the instances quoted from the life of the Prophet, the accounts of *Imams* and the deeds of the Companions of the Prophet, we know for sure that they regarded charity as a virtuous deed in the eyes of Allah.

The concept of Auqaf

In this context, it is useful to turn to the *Auqaf* (plural of *Waqf*), an established institution in Islam. The faithful gives away, in accordance with a prescribed procedure, some part of his earnings from different sources in the name of Allah. The resources thus gathered are used for charitable purposes.

Waqf and its plural form *awaqf* is an Arabic root verb derived from *Waqafa*, which means "to stop" or "to hold". When the word is employed in a legal sense with regard to a piece of land or a building, it signifies that henceforth the "property" is "stopped" ^[1]. In theory, it can never again change hands by inheritance, sale or seizure. An individual creating a waqf, known in Arabic as the "wqif", divests him or herself of the formal rights of possession, but retains the power to appoint a custodian "Mutwalli". The legal process by which one creates such an endowment is properly called *mawquf*, *mahbus*, *muhabbas* or *habis*. Founders of *awaqf* also have the power to distribute the income, which that property generates for any purpose they wish, that the purpose meritorious by "Islamic" standards.

Awaqf are "endowments in the general sense that they are gifts made to individuals as well as institutions. Throughout, in the history of the Islamic world, such settlements provided for many of the spiritual and temporal needs of Muslims. Funds derived from endowments built and sustained places of worship, established schools, hospitals, preachers and supported scholars. Sometime waqf served as a "trust" sustaining some religious or charitable institutions.

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At other times, waqf's provisions resemble those of a "will" or "entailment" and therefore had a private dimension. In practice, both public and private sphere mixed in any waqf, religious and temporal concerns blended in the minds of its founders. Muslim endowments (waqf) have been unique features of the socio-economic system of Islam. Though, the Holy Quran does not mention about awaqf or any institution similar to them, one of the

The General Nature of endowments under the Mughals

We have several historical examples of charitable institutions, even in ancient India *Kautilya's Arthshashtra*. Ashok's edicts and other inscriptions and authoritative works definitely suggest that from since the ancient times religious and charitable institutions in India came under the special protection of the secular authority. In addition to supervision exercised whenever there was mismanagement in them ^[2].

In 1206, the Delhi sultanate was established. This is when the history of *auqaf* began in India officially. Sultan Muizuddin Sam Ghor granted two villages to the Jama Masjid of Multan. Whenever a mosque was constructed, a piece of land or an entire village was attached to it ^[3]. Mohammad bin Tughlak appointed Ibn Battuta as the *Mutawalli* of the tomb of Sultan Qutubuddin to maintain accounts which the government auditors audited ^[4]. The income derived from the tomb was not sufficient for giving salary to the employees and therefore the Sultan ordered for the financial help for the dargah ^[5].

The Mughals introduced *madad-i maash* grants to support wide-ranging institutions and individuals with learned and scholarly inclination. During Akbar's reign, the beneficiaries included those who assisted him during a rebellion ^[6]. Under Jahangir, the landlords received grants, though the *ulema* were the principal recipients. The *Sadr us-Sudur* took care of their interests centrally in the provinces the *Sadr i-Juz* did so and the *Mutawallis* were the managers in *parganas*. Shahjahan created a *waqf* for the maintenance of the tomb of his wife Mumtaz Mahal, and that he himself acted as *Mutawalli*. Later on he appointed Agha Khan and Mahram Khan, in succession to the office ^[7]. This three-tier system rested on the system of delivery to the beneficiaries.

The property or land grants included the agricultural land and the cultivable waste. The ratio of the cultivated land and the cultivable land differed. At the beginning of Akbar's rule, the grants were made in cultivable lands ^[8], but only half of the grant lands were cultivable during the later part of his reign. Abul Fazl wrote that Akbar decreed that the *Suyurghal* lands should include half of agricultural and half worth for agriculture. Only one-fourth of the grants comprised of cultivated land. Soon, this changed and all the land grants were made out of cultivated land.

Auqaf could theoretically be of two types, *Waqf-i-Khairi*, endowments of a definitely religious or public nature (i.e., mosques, hospital, *madrassa*, bridge, water works, shrines, etc.) and *Waqf i-Ahli* or *Zurri* (family endowments, viz. for children or other relatives). The incomes were generally utilized for the maintenance of an endowed place, subsistence of the staff, and the 'needy and deserving'. The revenues accruing were free from taxation. The regular monetary assistance was *wazifa* (stipend) that was fixed on a daily, monthly and yearly basis ^[9].

Abul Fazl, the historian at Akbar's court, termed both kinds of grants (in the shape of land and cash) as *Suyurghal* ^[10].

They were created out of the revenues from a village or a cluster of villages, and were, broadly speaking, meant for teachers, physicians, retired employees, and the men engaged in religious activities, such as the *qazi*, *imam* and *khatib*. It was also used as a pension for retired officers in the court ^[11]. According to Abul Fazl, four categories of people deserved and received assistance: First, those who had withdrawn from all worldly occupations and had made the quest of knowledge their sole concern; second, the ascetics and the hermits who had left the world to get rid of selfish desires and human passions; the third, the poor and the needy; and men of noble birth, who from ignorance and want of learning were deprived of the means of acquiring money.

The benefit of *wazifa* was extended to non-Muslims, as well. Thus, revenue remissions and exemptions of various kinds were granted to Vitthal Das of Gokul. Akbar took good care of the Brahmins of Pushkar village. During one of his visits to Punjab, he visited Guru Amardas at Govindwal. Before leaving, he donated a vast area of land in the name of Guru's daughter, Bibi Bhani, for the *langar*. He also gave away nearly 100 *bighas* of land to the Zoroastrian religious leader, Meherji Rana. Another grantee was Mehr Tabib, who had been allotted a daily allowance and a grant of 50 *bighas* of land, which was extended to his son Qiyam Parsi ^[12].

Akbar prohibited the killing of animals in six Indian states where the Jains lived. In 1592, he conferred on them the hills of Sindhand, Girnar, Taranga and Keshrinath, all situated in Gujarat, the five hills of Rajgir, and the hill of Samet Shikhar of Parswanath of Bengal.

Jahangir granted 150 *bighas* in Sriram village of Pargana Amroha to Sri Ram and his sons. In his ninth year of accession, he made a grant of 210 *bighas* in *pargana* Laharpur to Lala Misra and some others ^[13]. He confirmed a grant of 100 *bighas* on Mulla Jamasp and his nephew Mulla Hoshang in 1618 ^[14].

Aurangzeb not only renewed grants to non-Muslims, but also confirmed the award of 78 *bighas* of land to *Jangams* of Banaras. In 1667, Sudaman and his son Pujari received a cash grant of Rs.20 (in lieu of their old grant of 2-½ *biswa*) and some cultivated waste land. On 29 July 29 1658, Aurangzeb confirmed Shantidas' entitlements in the hill and temples of Girnar under the jurisdiction of Junagadh and the hills and temples of Abuji, under Sirohi.

What was the method and process of the award of grants? Applications were submitted to the *Sadr us-Sudur*, who, after proper scrutiny, made a case before the emperor. He, in turn, presented the applicants at the *jharoka* or in the *gusalkhana* assemblies. Thereafter, the emperor's consent was sought and the *farman* was prepared. This process was fairly elaborate. First of all, the cases approved by the emperor were recorded in the *roznamcha* (daily record) of the *Waqai-i Nawis* (detective). After this, the *sarkhat* was issued and sent to the *diwani-i-kul*. The *farman* furnished the details of the application and the initial and final approval by the Emperor ^[15].

Conclusion

Probably, the Sultans and the Mughal emperors were drawn towards charitable activities, for which they expected rewards from Allah. Perhaps, they desired creating a constituency that would rally round them in a crisis-ridden situation. In other words, they depended on the 'Army of the

Prayer' (*Lashkar-i-dua*), whose influence, said Jahangir, would be greater than the soldiers in the army. Indeed, the *madad i-maash* grantees were often bound to pray for the prosperity and stability of the donor.

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